

THE MOTION PICTURE BOYS



IN A GREAT VENTURE

THE AEROPLANE BOYS SERIES

By
Capt. Frank Cobb

Three stirring stories of adventures in the air, in which wide-awake, red-blooded American boys figure as heroes.

TITLES

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or For a Comrade's Honor

2 AN AVIATOR'S LUCK,
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EACH VOLUME A 12MO, WITH
COLORED JACKET

THE
SAALFIELD PUBLISHING CO.
Akron, Ohio



He saw that the animal dared not advance further.

THE MOTION PICTURE COMRADES' GREAT VENTURE

OR

ON THE ROAD WITH THE "BIG ROUND-TOP"

BY

ELMER TRACEY BARNES



c

THE SAALFIELD PUBLISHING COMPANY

Chicago

AKRON, OHIO
MADE IN U. S. A.

New York

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THE MOTION PICTURE COMRADES' GREAT VENTURE

CHAPTER I

READY FOR THE START

"THEN it's as good as settled, do you mean, Oscar?"

"Well, they say, Jack, there's nothing absolutely certain in this old world but death and taxes. All the same, I don't see any reason why our splendid plans shouldn't be carried out to the limit."

"Team work gets results in lots of things besides baseball and football, Oscar. While I'm able and willing to contribute the experience I picked up, acting as my poor father's assistant in photography, you on your part have supplied all the funds required, and a heap more besides."

"That means you're well satisfied with the new camera, and the supplies we sent after, does it, Jack?"

"I tell you I'm right now fairly burning with a fever, wanting to start working with that dandy

outfit. It's the best on the market, and three times over superior to my old box. I'm dead sure I'll get smashing good results, too; unless I turn out to be a regular fizzle as an operator."

"Not much danger of Jack Anderson falling down when it comes to any sort of photographic stunts. You're a chip off the old block, everybody in our town says; and while your father may have been a clever workman, right now you're away ahead of *his* class. He'd be proud of you, Jack, if only he could see what you've done."

The boy answering to the name of Jack Anderson flushed at thus hearing his praises sung so sturdily, and by his chum Oscar Farrar at that, for he knew that every word spoken by the other sprang straight from his heart.

"Then all that remains to be done," he went on to say, earnestly, as though trying to hide his honest confusion, "is to decide which one of those three schemes we laid out for our first real big venture would offer the strongest attraction."

"That's what's bothering me more than a little," remarked Oscar, a line appearing across his usually placid forehead.

"Does that mean you're not satisfied with anything we've managed to think up so far?" asked the other, anxiously.

"To be fair with you," replied Oscar, "it strikes me that none of them has the element of novelty that both of us are after. There's so much competition nowadays in motion pictures that unless you strike something that's away out of the com-

mon everyday run you make a foozle, and nobody wants your work."

"I guess that's about the size of it," admitted Jack, moodily, for he was fairly crazy to get away, and be doing something with the splendid new outfit that tantalized him day and night, ever since it had come to hand, and he had made various tests all of which turned out wonderfully well.

"Now only a short time ago," pursued the methodical Oscar, "it was considered a drive if an operator rushed to the scene of a great flood, and ran off a reel showing the devastations caused by the breaking of a dam. But people have grown tired of seeing wrecked towns, and smashed railroad trains. They want something out of the usual for their money. And nobody ever had a better chance to accomplish a big thing than we have right now."

"Oh! I've badgered my brain right along," confessed Jack, with a poorly concealed groan, "but somehow I don't seem to get the idea I'm groping after; to be sure, I have some ambitious schemes in mind that could be attempted after we show what we can do nearer home; and for one there's a trip to the wilds of South Africa, to get a lot of films of wild animals in their native haunts that will go ahead of anything now on the market; but that's too big a scheme for a beginning."

"Yes," added Oscar, reflectively, "that's the trouble, and we ought to try something nearer home for a starter. I've got an idea or two tucked away in my brain that offer a stupendous chance

later on, but I'm keeping them held down tight, and sitting on the lid. We've got to show what we can do with our new outfit first before we figure on any really big scheme that will take us far away from home."

"Well, what's the answer, then, Oscar, because something tells me you've got an idea to suggest?"

"Listen, then, Jack. There's no use talking, we've got to pull in another head to help us out. There may be times when three will prove a whole lot better than just two of us. And so far as the expense goes, that never bothers me, you know."

"Are you thinking of Ballyhoo Jones?" demanded Jack, instantly, a faint smile creeping across his face, as though the mere mention of that fantastic name somehow pleased him.

"He's the very fellow," came the steady reply. "Every boy in town likes Ballyhoo Jones, who's the best-natured chap alive. He can drive away the blues better than any tonic ever invented, with his imitation of a band, together with the grunts and cries of every sort of wild animal in the menagerie. We need him with us, Jack, I'm giving it to you straight."

"If we do have to ask a third fellow to go along with us, Oscar, you couldn't pick any one to suit me better than Ballyhoo. And look here, have you been sounding him any, to see what chance there would be of his folks letting him go out on the road with us?"

"Well, I thought that thing would have to be

decided in the start," admitted the other, frankly, "so I told him something about our plans; and Jack, he was tickled almost to death over the idea of accompanying us."

"But you don't know for certain, do you, whether he could get permission to be one of the party?" asked Jack.

His chum laughed, as though amused at the eagerness shown when Jack heard the latest news.

"That's just why I led you here to this corner of Main Street and Jackson Avenue," he hastened to explain. "I agreed to meet Ballyhoo Jones here at about three this afternoon, when he was to bring the answer."

"Well, it's just that time now," asserted the other, "there goes the town clock striking, as sure as you live."

"Yes, and look down the street, will you?" chuckled Oscar, nodding his head as he spoke.

"It's Ballyhoo, as certain as anything, and on the run at that. There, he's waving his hand at us, Oscar; and if that wide grin on his face stands for anything he's got all the permission he wants to go along with us."

"I guess you're right, Jack, because he was fairly wild about it; and you'd see him coming along looking like a mourner at a funeral if he couldn't go."

The newcomer hastened to join the pair at the corner. He was an agile looking chap with a beaming, comical face that made him friends wherever he went. In fact, the Jones boy never did

have an enemy in the wide world, which was a record no other fellow in Melancton could boast of.

His real name was Jonathan Edwards Jones, but a long time ago he showed such a remarkable talent for mimicing the cries of all manner of wild animals, such as a traveling menagerie usually boasts, and could perform so many stunts peculiar to the tumbling and trapeze artists of the tanbark ring, that some ingenious comrade had given him the nickname of "Ballyhoo"—possibly after hearing him copy a side-show fakir shouting out the merits of the "Rubber-skin Man, the Bearded Lady, the Man-ape from Borneo," or some such attraction. And as "Ballyhoo" Jones he was known among the juvenile population far and wide.

He was panting for breath as he came up, but that did not prevent him from announcing the joyous news.

"I can go along with you, Oscar, all right!" he gasped, making all sorts of faces while trying to suck in his breath between words. "I wheedled mom to say yes, and you know that fixes it, for she's the real boss in our house. And ah! let me tell you I'm as happy as pie over it. I never expected to have such a bully thing drop right down in our front dooryard. I hope now Jack is agreeable in the bargain; you didn't just explain how *he* felt about it, Oscar."

"That's because I didn't know anything about it until just now," Jack himself hastened to say,

impulsively stretching out a hand to the other, which was eagerly seized and heartily squeezed.

“Does that mean you really would like to have me tag along with you two, Jack?” continued the Jones boy, still a lot apprehensive it seemed, as though he found it hard to believe the splendid near-miracle that had suddenly come to pass, and which promised to enliven the holiday season for him beyond all anticipation.

“Oscar and I have decided that we ought to have a third fellow along with us,” explained Jack; “because there will be plenty of hard work to do toting the camera and outfit in out-of-the-way places. Besides, sometimes two fellows get held up by some puzzling thing, and a third head might see a way out that hadn’t occurred to them. You were always bright about thinking up things, Ballyhoo.”

“That’s nice of you to say it, Jack,” laughed the other, but at the same time he looked pleased at the compliment.

“Right now,” remarked Oscar, seriously, “we’re up against a proposition to which so far neither of us seems able to hit an answer. We’ve thought up three schemes for a starter in this game of novel picture taking, but somehow none of them seems to be what we’re after—too ordinary, I mean, and without the stunning and uncommon effects we’re aiming to get. And Ballyhoo, if you could only get on to *something different* it would fix us up in great shape, let me tell you.”

Anxiously, both Jack and Oscar scanned the smiling face of the new recruit. That grin seemed to expand until Ballyhoo fairly beamed on them.

"Well, now," he went on to say, trying to speak seriously, though it was always a tremendous effort for him to forget that this world was mostly a hilarious old planet, and intended for the entertainment of boys in general, "d'ye know I got to thinking about that very thing after Oscar gave me the chance to go along."

The other pair exchanged quick glances; Oscar nodded his head as though to say: "Didn't I tell you he'd be our right bower yet, given a chance to figure on things?" while Jack plucked at the sleeve of Ballyhoo Jones, and in a voice of entreaty said:

"Tell us what the scheme is, then, please, Ballyhoo! Oh! I hope you've hit on some idea that opens up a big game for us. Hurry up and smash the line, like you did in our great football game last Thanksgiving when we barely won out."

"Here it is," said the other, quickly. "What's to hinder us from making an arrangement to go along with the circus that's showing around in the larger towns and cities, and picking up a wonderful lot of pictures featuring what real life under the Big Round-top is like?"

CHAPTER II

ON THE ROAD TO CIRCUS-TOWN

BALLYHOO JONES having launched his bolt, stood there expectantly, waiting to see what effect the proposition might have upon his comrades.

"You must mean Barley's Great Show, I take it, Ballyhoo, don't you?" asked Oscar.

"Yes, the 'World-wide Aggregation of Wonders,' as he advertises it on the fences," replied the other.

"It's not going to strike our town, more's the pity, but I've got a list of places and dates for the month ahead. It was pasted on the post-office bulletin board last night; and you know I'm always keen on everything that's connected with a circus troupe."

"Oscar, do you know it's beginning to dawn on me that there's something bordering on a whopping big idea in that suggestion Ballyhoo has just made?" cried Jack, who had evidently been swiftly revolving matters in his active mind, and had reached a conclusion.

"Good circus films are pretty rare nowadays," admitted Oscar; "one reason may be because the owners don't like the idea of having their best

acts filched, and shown on the screen in every village where they have a movie house. But a really smart man like they say Major Barley is, might be made to see that he could get a heap of free advertising out of just that same thing."

"Of course he could," supplemented Ballyhoo. "What boy'd think of staying away from the circus just because some time or other he'd glimpsed a picture of the lion-tamer making his pets play pyramid, or loop the loop to the music of his whip? Not much, for he'd only want to see the real thing with his own eyes all the more."

"But could we get a favorable answer from the circus owner, do you think?" Oscar went on to say, a little dubiously.

"Oh! I'm sure *you* could wheedle him into agreeing to any sort of arrangement, if you showed just how it would advertise him all over the country as the leading showman of the age," said Jack, quietly. "You know how to convince a fellow that black's white, Oscar; dad always said you'd make the boss lawyer, if only you decided to take to the bar."

"I'm game to make the try, anyhow," asserted Oscar, with a look of relief upon his face. "Come around to my house after supper, when I'll show you the letter I shall write on my typewriter. If it strikes you as the proper caper, it can go out on the ten o'clock train to-night."

"The sooner this thing is settled the better I'll be pleased!" declared Jack.

"Oh! make up your mind the Major will jump

at the chance to get all that free advertising," Ballyhoo Jones went on to say, confidently.

"Are you meaning to break away from us right now, Oscar?" queried Jack, when he saw the other acting as though about to walk off.

"I've got several errands on my list that I want to attend to," explained the other. "Talk this thing over, fellows, and be sure to run in on me after supper, when we'll fix it up to beat the band."

"I'll bring my memorandum of dates along, Oscar, and mebbe by then I'll have thought up something more worth while," called out Ballyhoo, as the third boy walked off.

That July night Oscar had hardly finished his supper when there was a ring at the doorbell, and upon his hurrying to answer the same he found Jack there. Being an orphan, Oscar lived with his guardian, Dr. Felix Clements, an elderly gentleman who sympathized with boys in all their ambitions, and whom Oscar could easily convince that it was to his interest to do just about what he wanted.

During the preceding winter Oscar had passed through a serious illness, and his alarmed guardian was firmly decided that he should not attend school again for at least a full year. His main idea was that the boy needed an abundance of open air to build him up; and as this just suited Oscar's ideas of happiness.

He had always been fond of hunting and fishing, and spent considerable time in pursuit of his

hobbies. Then came his acquaintance with Jack Anderson, with their becoming close chums. This caused new ideas to take form in Oscar's mind, doubtless engendered by contact with the ardent photographer; and in the end it resulted in their resolution to spend the balance of the summer searching for wonderful pictures that would be apt to thrill audiences all over the country, if shown on the screen in motion picture houses.

"I called for Ballyhoo," Jack started to say as soon as the door opened and he saw Oscar; "but he hadn't finished eating. Said he'd be over right away."

"Come along up to my den and we'll talk matters over while we wait for him to show up," suggested Oscar, when the other caught his sleeve and exclaimed:

"Hold on, don't shut the door yet, I heard some one running along the road just then. Yes, it's Ballyhoo, sure enough. What do you think of that, for once he's broken away from the food when he wasn't more'n half through. It's next door to a miracle, Oscar."

"It only shows what a hold this scheme of ours has got on his mind," chuckled the other.

Five minutes later the trio were comfortably seated in Oscar's den. This was as delightful a "loafing place" as any boy's mind could imagine, because the proprietor, not lacking in means to provide himself with anything that came into his mind, had guns, fishing rods, tennis racquets, snow-shoes and all manner of similar requisites of

outdoor games fastened to the walls, amidst numerous college flags that gave color to the picture.

Oscar lost no time in reading aloud the letter he had written to the proprietor of Barley's Circus. It was certainly well conceived, and while laying before the showman the advantages of being so generally advertised, at the same time gave him to understand that there were other traveling troupes besides his, any one of which might be glad to extend an invitation to the three ambitious young photographers.

The comments on this letter being all of a favorable character, there were no material changes made in it.

"After we once meet Major Barley," Oscar had said, "we may come to some different arrangement, but to start with I should think this would cover the bill."

"Let it go at that then," suggested Jack.

"Second the motion," added Ballyhoo, who, truth to tell, was ready to back any sort of scheme with might and main, if only it resulted in their being able to attach to themselves the fortunes of a traveling circus for a stated period.

Accordingly, Oscar sealed the envelope, already stamped; after which the trio set out for the town post-office, where any mail deposited up to a quarter of the hour would go out on the ten-o'clock train bound west.

Two anxious days followed, but the boys utilized this time in completing their arrangements for a quick start in case an affirmative answer was re-

ceived. Oscar had a serviceable car which he meant to use. It was far from new, but could be relied on to mount hills at a moderate speed, and not break down more than three times a day. To eliminate as much of the chances for trouble as possible, Oscar purchased a brand new set of tires, and hoped for the best.

When the mail came in twice a day the three boys haunted the post-office, and waylaid the carrier as soon as he started forth on his delivery. It was on the afternoon of the third day, however, before the letter so eagerly looked for arrived. Oscar's hands fairly quivered as he started to tear the envelope open; for all of them had noticed the gaudy coloring that marked the advertisement of Barley's World Famous Circus.

One look over the type-written sheet and Oscar gave a whoop.

"It's all right, boys!" he exclaimed, hoarsely; "this letter is signed by Major Barley himself, and it says that he's greatly interested in our scheme, so that if we choose to join him to-morrow afternoon at Provincetown, where they exhibit, he'll be glad to talk matters over with us, and doesn't doubt in the least that favorable arrangements can be made to carry out all our plans!"

Jack and Ballyhoo were so overcome with the happy news that they actually fell on one another's neck and did a double shuffle dance.

Of course, arrangements were soon made looking to their departure on the following day. Provincetown was something like fifty miles away, and

Oscar, who was provided with all necessary road maps, easily picked out the best line of travel.

Three happier boys certainly never started forth on any kind of excursion. The earth, the sky, and all Nature about them looked joyous, and beckoned them on their way. Even the old car forgot to wheeze as usual, and surprised its owner by a willingness to speed far beyond its customary limit.

They had been moving along for something like an hour when suddenly loud cries reached their ears—cries that seemed to be in the voices of women and children, though just then there were no houses in sight, only woods and farm land.

“It comes from over yonder in the patch of timber!” snapped Jack. “Oh! look, will you, there’s some sort of queer camp in among those trees. I can see grimy tents, and wagons highly painted. Say, I wouldn’t be surprised now if that’s a gypsy camp; and something terrible must have happened by the way the women and children are running about waving their arms. Speed her up, Oscar, and let’s see what’s the matter.”

CHAPTER III

THE GYPSY CARAVAN AT CLOSE QUARTERS

"THERE doesn't seem to be any men folks around that I can see!" ejaculated Ballyhoo Jones, as Oscar speeded the car along the road in the direction of the particular patch of woods indicated by Jack when he pointed ahead.

"Oh! there's a sort of fair over at Metuchen to-day," explained Oscar, "and like as not the gypsy men are trading horses there, with some of the women and girls telling fortunes and selling curios. That's what they aim to do whenever they get a chance at a fair."

It took them but a minute to arrive close to the scene of disturbance, when the car was brought to a halt, and all three boys tumbled out. Then pushing forward through an opening in the group, they discovered what all the noise and excitement was about.

A child had been seriously cut, and was bleeding profusely. The old woman who was looked upon as the tribe doctress, was away at the fair, because it happened that she played the part of the chief fortune-teller at the same time, and could manage to wheedle credulous folks out of more of

their hard-earned money than even the pretty maid who assisted her.

The women left in the camp were trying to do something to stop the bleeding, but their crude efforts did not seem to be meeting with any great measure of success.

"Here, let me take charge of this case," Oscar said hurriedly. "I've worked with my guardian, Doctor Clements, and know how to stop that bleeding. Keep back, and don't crowd so close, do you hear? The little chap must have air. One of you boys fan him while I'm working."

Ballyhoo Jones immediately bent over and proceeded to do this, having snatched up a large leaf from a nearby mullen stalk. Jack, too, hovered near, ready to assist his chum, should Oscar need him. The swarthy-faced bunch stood there and stared to see a mere boy so clever with his hands, and managing just about as well as a regular house-dweller doctor would have done in a like case.

It was not much of a job to stop the bleeding, when the use of a tourniquet was understood. Oscar knew, however, that something beyond this was needed so as to unite the lips of the partly severed vein. Fortunately, he carried a little bill-book in his coat pocket that contained all the necessary appliances, such as a surgeon's needle and special thread for such purposes.

"There's a cloud of dust along the road up there," announced Ballyhoo, about the time the delicate operation was concluded, and Oscar had

bound the injured leg up as best the conditions admitted; "and like as not it might be the men of this gypsy caravan coming home from the fair with their traded horses."

"Your guess wins, Ballyhoo," said Jack, presently; "they're gypsies all right. Look again, and you'll glimpse several women in that buggy. One of the same seems to be the queen of the bunch, and I reckon she's the bone-setter who would have doctored this poor, little chap if she'd been on deck. I wonder how she'll like your fine job, Oscar?"

"Huh! she can't help but like it," asserted Ballyhoo Jones, aggressively. "The kid might have bled to death before she got back home. And like as not she never could have brought that partly severed vein together like *our* surgeon did."

"We'll know right soon, anyway," added Jack, "because here they come with a rush. I guess they see our car, and the crowd here, and wonder what's up."

A number of dark-faced men riding horses and leading others came galloping up and throwing themselves to the ground joined the group. Excited voices explained what had happened, and the three boys saw the expression of suspicion leave the faces of the gypsies when they learned how the trio had done everything in their power to save the child's life.

Then the old queen came on the scene, and the chattering was renewed. Nothing would do but that she must minutely examine the injured limb,

which she proceeded to do, while the three boys waited with more or less anxiety, to see what the result would be, and there was a general craning of necks on the part of all around.

When Oscar saw the old crone nod her head violently he knew that his work had met with her hearty approbation. There was some exchange of talk in the Romany dialect, which seemed all Greek to the boys; after which those sharp little black eyes of the queen were fastened on Oscar.

“You have done a good job, boy. I think you have saved the child’s life. We are only rovers, but even gypsies can be grateful. If there is anything we can do to show you we are thankful tell us now; for I do not believe it is money that would pay you for your trouble.”

Oscar was astonished to hear the old woman talk so well. He had had an idea that most gypsies were foreigners, who, besides their Romany language, could understand very little English. It seemed that this was a mistake; but then, perhaps these were English gypsies, who had come across the sea to get away from a war-racked country.

So Oscar turned to his mates.

“Here’s your chance now, fellows,” he told them. “These people want to do something to show they’re grateful for favors received. I don’t know of a single thing I’d like to have, unless the head man would care to part with that queer-shaped copper kettle I see over there, which I’d like to possess, just to remember this adventure

by. How about you, Jack; would a few rattling good pictures of gypsy life fill a long felt want in the popular fancy, eh?"

Jack jumped at the chance.

"Oh! I believe we could get a reel of pictures here that would be well worth taking, Oscar, if only they'd enter into the thing whole-heartedly."

When the head man of the tribe learned what was wanted he readily agreed to do anything the three lads wished, just to show them that gypsies could be grateful for favors received.

"Well, I guess after all they know a whole lot about motion pictures," said Ballyhoo Jones, after the entire community had made several very effective poses, with the wagons in full sight, and the fires smoking bravely.

"That's right, they do know about them," Jack told him. "The head man confessed that all of them had more than once attended exhibitions that were given in airodomes, for no true gypsy, who cares for his reputation, will ever be caught under a roof, if he can help it. And they're going to hitch up to make a start to another camping place, so I'll get a picture of them on the road."

Inside of an hour or so the boys had succeeded in securing a series of very interesting pictures covering the every-day life of a gypsy caravan on the road, in camp, and at work at their various trades or professions, from trading horses and telling fortunes to cooking meals, making fancy blankets, and a number of other things.

When finally it was decided to start forth once

more, heading in the direction of Provincetown, the gypsy string of gaudy vans and the led horses was passing along the road headed in the opposite direction.

"What do you think about that for a bit of good luck?" asked Oscar, when they were once more moving along toward their destination.

"It looks like a splendid omen, to me," admitted Ballyhoo Jones. "I take it to be like a rainbow of promise. You mark my word, we're going to have a successful season of it."

"I know that I've picked up some pretty clever pictures, that ought to be worth considerable to me," admitted Jack, with an eye to business. "That's one of the greatest features about this thing, you never can tell just what you're going to strike as you go along through the country. The only thing to do is to go prepared to get busy at short notice. A runaway horse smashing a wagon, and dumping out an old woman with her baskets of eggs and milk-pans wouldn't seem so comical to us; but an audience in a movie theatre would laugh themselves sick over it, believing it was all a fake picture, you understand, and that nobody was hurt."

"I feel like you do, Ballyhoo," admitted Oscar, "and that such a fine beginning promises even a better ending. Now, we ought to get some astonishing pictures of circus life, if all goes well. I'm banking on that new outfit, with a wizard like Jack here to turn the crank when he's set things buzzing just as he wants."

"One thing I noticed, Oscar," observed Jack, "which was that you managed to hoodoo the head man, so that he made you a present of that queer old copper kettle."

"That's right. I did manage to coax the old chap to let me have it, and right now it's safe and sound under your rear seat there. But I slipped a tight little wad of money in his itching palm just before we came away that made him happy. A gypsy is more or less of a miser, you understand, and money always talks with him."

"So that explains why he went around shaking hands with all of us and telling how proud he was to know such a fine bunch of boys," laughed Jack.

"Look there!" cried Ballyhoo Jones, suddenly pointing, "the circus posters, and a gay lot they are in the bargain, telling how the Greatest Aggregation of World-Wide Wonders will be seen in Provincetown on the afternoon of the seventh of July, which is to-day; and we must be getting near that burg right now, if all these country wagons and buggies we're passing on the road filled with people in their Sunday best bib and tuckers stand for anything."

CHAPTER IV.

UNDER THE THRALL OF THE CIRCUS BAND

THE others began to share the enthusiasm of Ballyhoo Jones. Indeed, just to gaze upon those flamboyant posters, with their wonderful pictures of bareback riders; trapeze artists swinging by their teeth from dizzy heights; tumblers who rocketed over a string of horses and elephants in daring whirls; thrilling scenes of the beautiful lady lion-tamer cracking her whip, while the fierce beasts snarled, and struck at her with their terrible paws—all this and much more was quite sufficient to make the average boy quiver with eager anticipation.

“Sometimes,” remarked Ballyhoo Jones, reflectively, as they sped on, passing increasing numbers of country vehicles, all headed for the town, “I begin to believe I’m fast gripped in a lovely dream, and I’m half tempted to ask one of my mates to stick a pin in me.”

“What for, you human pin-cushion?” laughed Oscar, at the wheel.

“Just to really see if I am asleep or awake,” continued the Jones boy; “because it’s mighty hard for me to believe that I’m about to reach the

goal of all my early hopes, and actually see the inside workings of a genuine big circus."

"Well, wake up then," Jack told him, with a shove of his elbow, "and take another look ahead. There's the town in plain sight, yes, and you can glimpse the Big Roundtop as easy as falling off a log."

"Whee! look at all the flags and streamers afflyin', will you?" gasped Ballyhoo, in a paroxysm of delight; and the sight so affected him that he even tried to hug himself, after Jack had repelled his advances.

They soon approached the outskirts of the town. The vehicles became more numerous than ever, and gay parties of country folks, not all young ones at that, could be seen, heading toward the one bright spot where that monster drab tent stood out like a beckoning hand.

The gay music of the circus band also throbbed on the afternoon air. Apparently, the parade through the streets of Provincetown had been finished on schedule time, and preparations were now in full blast for the afternoon performance.

"What's the programme now, Oscar?" asked Jack, when they had taken the car to a garage that happened to be handy.

"I was thinking perhaps we'd better spend some time in the menagerie tent watching the animals, and making a start figuring out what you think would be the best picture when feeding time arrives. To get the finest results, though, I imagine you'll have to select the brightest day that comes

along, when the sun is shining, and you can get all the light possible inside the tent."

Accordingly, they forced their way into the throng that was still paying admission, and passed into the first tent. This was the menagerie, through which the audience had to go in order to reach the arena where the circus proper was in full blast.

Ballyhoo was quite at home now. He had "played circus" himself so many times that coming face to face with the animals was like meeting old friends.

He talked with the animals as he went, and indulged in so many queer antics as he imitated their various calls that he soon became an object of attention to quite a number of those still loitering in the menagerie; as well as several attendants, who hovered in the wake of the trio, possibly to make sure that the lively Ballyhoo did not grow bold enough to try to shake hands with Leo, the lion, or Nabob, the striped tiger from the jungles of India.

One gentleman in particular seemed to be greatly amused by the antics of the Jones boy. He evidently had a great love for animals himself, and only attended the show in order to loiter around and observe their characteristics.

With a smile on his face he finally stopped a minute while passing the three chums, and looking straight at Ballyhoo went on to say:

"I don't see for the life of me what my old friend Major Barley can be thinking about to

spend so much of his good money carrying dozens of high-priced artists on his payroll, when if he kept his eyes open he could get a whole circus rolled into one by contracting with you, son. Upon my word you're simply a *marvel*, and I think he could even dispense with the band-wagon entirely, for you seem able to imitate the entire aggregation. No offense meant, son, but see the Major before you go back home."

And chuckling as though greatly amused, the gentleman sauntered on, leaving Ballyhoo Jones burning with confusion, tinged with delight.

Oscar was in no great hurry to see the performance. It might be as well to wait until the night show was on, for he understood that the matinee performance never equalled that given under the glare of the myriad lamps that served to illumine the big tent, and added a peculiar attraction to the scene which it could never possess in daytime.

Jack stepped over to the opening several times in order to take a fugitive look into the other tent, wishing to get some idea as to the vastness of the game they now had in hand. But it was really with the eye of a trained photographer.

Ballyhoo managed to hold himself in check. He often glanced in the direction of the entrance to the circus tent, and Oscar could see him lick his lips; just as a boy might when devouring some prize cake with his eyes, but holding his appetite in restraint, even though his mouth fairly watered with eagerness.

"We want to see the crowd pouring out after

it's all over, for one thing," suggested the practical Jack; "and from the way things are going I reckon that time won't be so very long in coming. Suppose we step out now, and look around?"

The side shows were still in full blast, and glib-tongued fakirs who stood in front of each tent had commenced to shout their "patter" at the top of their lungs, hoping to attract a fair patronage as the audience began to come out from the big show.

Here Ballyhoo found more things to amuse him. The woman who had the snakes, both large and small, wound around her person, with their heads laid against her cheek held his attention a long time. Ballyhoo, however, had no love for the crawlers; they did not enter into his conception of an Eden where all animals might enter but serpents were barred. So it was more a matter of fascination and horror that glued him to the spot long after his chums had moved on, to listen to the "spieler" who told of the ferocious "Wild Man from Borneo" who could break a chain as easy as the ordinary person could a willow wand, and had to be weighted down with irons in order to keep him from cleaning up the whole town.

Then came the mob pouring forth in a living, chattering stream. Jack sized it up, and figured on just the proper view he should select in order to give versatility to such a picture. By this time Jack was up to his eyes in the business, even before they had come to any sort of arrangement with the proprietor.

The afternoon waned, and by degrees the peo-

ple left for home, though others would presently be arriving in town for the night performance, most of them kept busy on the farm while the sun was up. Groups of town boys lingered, and no doubt many a lad would have to hatch up some clever excuse for being late to supper that evening. But then it is not every day that a circus comes to town, and those men who could not forget their own boyhood would make due allowances, and forgive; in fact, most of them would find an excuse to take the boy to the show that night, just because they had "promised him such a treat a long while before."

"It's about time we hunted the Major up, I should think," suggested Oscar, after they had grown weary of wandering around, and the crowd having almost wholly departed there fell upon the circus grounds a sort of dullness, enlivened only by loud talking from the living tents in the rear, or it might be the clamor of some wild animal longing for the next meal.

"That's right," Jack hastened to say. "Let's ask where we can find him, and send in our card. We'll soon know what our luck is going to be; but honest now, boys, I haven't got any doubt what we'll knock the persimmons down with our long pole."

CHAPTER V

THE PEOPLE OF THE TANBARK RING

"WE would like to see Major Barley," Oscar told one of the attendants, who had barred their entrance to the circus tent proper, and was eyeing them suspiciously.

Possibly he had been one of those who observed Ballyhoo's antics earlier in the afternoon, and conceived the idea that the boy meant to take the advice offered by the gentleman who had told him to apply to the proprietor for a job as he was seemingly capable of carrying on the entire show without any aid.

"He's right busy just now, and won't see you; call again!" snapped the man, waving them aside.

"All we ask is that some one take our card in to the major," suggested Oscar, smiling pleasantly; for if they anticipated being with the Big Show for a fortnight it would be the worst kind of policy to make even one enemy to start with; and even obscure canvasmen can add to the discomforts of living, on occasion.

That smile evidently won the rough fellow.

"Here, Joe!" he called out to a half-grown boy who was passing, bearing a bucket of water possibly for the elephant, "set that pail down, and

take this card to the major. Tell him the greatest Living Wonder of this or any other age is awaitin' to see him out here," and he even condescended to grin at the furiously blushing Ballyhoo Jones.

Inside of three minutes the boy came bounding back.

"The Major sez tuh ask 'em to come back tuh his den," he told the other.

"All right, Joe, an' you lead 'em there. Then get back here in a hurry to fetch six more pails of water. That tusker is as dry as a bone to-day, seems like."

A minute later and they found themselves in the presence of Major Barley, the widely known circus man, whose posters had possibly covered more walls and fences than any other in America.

He was a tall man, and had a silk hat perched on his head which, as a rule, was tilted back from his forehead. His countenance was ruddy, almost rosy in fact, perhaps due to exposure to the sun and wind, and possibly from some other reason. But he struck Oscar as a keen business man.

"Glad to meet you, young fellows," he told them, in a fog-horn sort of voice, as though habits associated with his early days when he was himself a "barker" for a side-show, could never be lived down.

He squeezed a hand of each, and then motioned to partly broken camp-chairs, or boxes that might offer some sort of seat.

"Now suppose you tell me a whole lot more of

what you purpose doing with my big show," he remarked, which gave Oscar the opening he wanted.

Starting in, the boy told about the things Jack had already accomplished in the line of expert photography; how he came by his talent in that respect; what his great ambition was; of the several wonderful trips they had planned that might take them to the furthestmost parts of the earth; and lastly how they figured that thus far the circus had been almost neglected, when it came to taking motion pictures.

"We selected your show, Major Barley," concluded the adroit Oscar, "because it was a leader in its line. Then, too, we heard that you were the most enterprising and up-to-date showman in America to-day; and believed that you would never let us pass on to an inferior combination to advertise it as the top-notch circus of the day. Now we'd like to know what you think about it, for we have other plans in view for to-morrow if we fail to make a contract with you."

That was a master-stroke on the part of Oscar. He happened to know that there had always been an intense rivalry between Major Barley and the owner of the Powell Wild West Combination of Shows, just then exhibiting at Fairfax, only thirty-three miles distant from Provincetown. Naturally, the major would believe they had a date with Alvin Powell, the enterprising head of the other circus; which was just what Oscar wanted him to think.

Immediately the Major evinced the most decided interest. Possibly the fact that he could make a contract with them whereby it would not cost him a dollar to have his show advertised all over the country to millions of people interested in motion pictures, had considerable to do with his eagerness to close a bargain.

After considerable talk a contract which Oscar produced met with the approbation of the Major. They were to be entertained, free of cost, during their stay, which might be of ten days' duration or longer; every possible opportunity to secure striking pictures was to be thrown in their way; and in return the films were to be the sole property of the boys.

When finally the signatures of the three boys, as well as that of Major Barley, had been appended to duplicate contracts, and duly witnessed by a couple of men whom he called in from an adjoining dressing-room, the young operators felt as if they were now finally enlisted in the big game.

"Where have you your outfit?" asked the Major, a little later.

"We left it in charge of the garage man, who promised to guard it faithfully," explained Jack; "but I'm more than a little anxious about it, because it's brand new, and the best on the market. I hope you will arrange with us to have our camera and the rest of the outfit taken care of here, Major Barley."

"That can be easily done, Jack," said the gen-

ial proprietor of the show; "excuse me for any undue familiarity, boys, but if we are meaning to work together you must be Oscar, Jack and Ballyhoo to me, you know. Why, I'm plain Jim to a good many of my oldest and most valued artists, some of whom knew me when I was only a barker to a side-show. You see I'm not ashamed to own up to that, in fact, I'm a whole lot proud of my rise in the world."

He sent Jack off with a couple of lusty all-round canvasmen to "tote" the outfit from the neighboring garage. As the show would be on the move again before midnight came around it was just as well that they keep the precious camera in hand.

When these arrangements had been completed, Major Barley announced that since supper would not be ready for half an hour or more, the boys had better come with him so as to make the acquaintance of some of the people connected with the show. This pleased them all, particularly Ballyhoo Jones. Fond as he was of animals, at the same time the boy had always yearned actually to meet some of those clowns and athletes, not to mention the lady performers, face to face; and now this wonderful golden chance was about to dawn upon him.

By the time they reached the tents used as dressing-rooms by the troupe, all of the performers had changed to their street clothes; so it was next to impossible to tell the clowns from the trapeze artists, or the lion-tamer from the fellow whose daily part it was to play the countryman, willing

to try to ride the trick donkey, and after being tossed off three times settling himself with his head toward the animal's tail, in which position he would manage to circle the ring, and apparently win the prize of ten dollars offered to the public.

The first one they were introduced to was a tall, rather melancholy-looking man; and the boys, who had believed that a clown must be a most rollicking sort of a chap off the boards as well as in the ring were astonished when the showman said:

"This is Martesa, our veteran leading clown, who has been before the public more years than he cares to acknowledge. You'll find him a good fellow, boys; and here, let me also make you acquainted with La Belle Rosa, our coming bareback rider, who is a spoiled ward of the show, and of Martesa as well."

They were immediately interested in the diminutive rider, whose daring exploits they had seen blazoned in colors on the fences and bill-boards about town. She was really a sweet-faced little thing, hardly more than a child, for she could not be above twelve years of age. Doubtless, being brought up in a circus atmosphere had been in part responsible for her taking to the ring; Martesa must have encouraged her in taking up such a following, for since his own life was wrapped up in circus work he must expect to spend the remainder of his days in the tanbark ring.

All of the boys fancied they would be glad of the opportunity to know the sober old fun-maker and his pretty ward better, and hoped to see more of

them later on. Then they were introduced to a dozen people, one after the other, many of whom eyed them wonderingly, as though in doubt as to their standing, until the showman finally announced in his foghorn voice just what the mission of Oscar and his two chums chanced to be.

In turn, they met the ring-master, Lionel Carew, who had what Oscar called a hard face, as though he might crack the whip in private life as well as when speeding the horses around the circuit; Señor Hernandez, the lion-tamer, a native of Brazil, he told them; M'lle Aime, known far and wide as the Leopard Woman because of the intrepid way in which she made a cage of the spotted beasts obey her will; and not forgetting Shamus O'Brien, the head elephant keeper, who was once in India, and had learned his peculiar trade there while catching wild elephants for government use.

There were others, too, hosts of them, from the gymnasts and trapeze performers, men and women, down to the other clowns, and the more obscure artists who did not figure quite so prominently in those gigantic bills that used up all the strong adjectives in the dictionary in order to do full justice to the merits of the show.

Later on, they once more found themselves with the proprietor.

"Supper will soon be called, boys," he told them, "and you are slated to eat in company with Martesa and La Belle Rosa. I have selected them for several reasons. In the first place he's a quiet, unassuming chap, whom we all like greatly. Then,

excuse me for saying it, but I could see with one eye that all of you were immediately interested in our little girl Rosa. You'll like her better and better the more you get to know her."

"You called her the ward of the clown, Major Barley," he ventured; "would you mind telling us a little more about that strangely assorted pair, she, so sweet and full of spirits, and the old man appearing so sad and forlorn?"

"Oh! you mustn't get that opinion of Martesa, altogether, son," remarked the showman; "he can be merry, too, when the mood is on him. But you know that a clown has to act his part of a laughing fool so much in the ring that, as a rule, he grows to be very sober in private life. I never knew that to fail in all my experience. But then Martesa, or John Simpson as he is in reality, has some reason to wear a long face. Years ago, I'm telling you this in confidence remember, his wife ran away from him, leaving a note that she was tired of being the mate of a silly circus clown, and meant to see life higher up. Since then he's been a morose man, though in the clown rig he sets the audience shrieking with laughter, and has been a prime favorite."

"But about little Rosa, Major?" pursued Jack.

"Yes, I must tell you of her, for it is just as well that you know in the beginning that she is looked on in a way as the child of the Barley Shows. She was left as a baby by an unknown heartless mother, and somehow Martesa took it upon himself to adopt her legally before any one

else could interfere. He has watched over her just as tenderly as a father could have done, spending all his earnings to take care of her as a child."

"Good for Martesa!" said Ballyhoo, deeply interested. "I expected he was that kind of a chap; and I'm going to like him immensely, that's certain."

"Then nobody really knows who the girl's folks are?" ventured Oscar.

"No one has ever shown up to advance the first claim," replied the showman, "and the old clown would fight to the death now before he'd ever think of giving her up. He's stood a whole lot of abuse and bullyragging from my efficient but cold-blooded ring-master, because he fears he might not be able to secure another job, as he's getting well on in years now, you know; and it's all been for love of the girl."

The more they heard the better the boys liked Martesa. Why, with this strange mystery hovering over the head of La Belle Rosa, the pride of the circus, it seemed very much like a thrilling story. And what they heard the Major say about the iron-jawed though handsome, ring-master caused them to dislike the man more than ever.

CHAPTER VI

THE CLOWN AND LITTLE ROSA

"SUPPER is ready!"

No sooner had this cry been passed along than there was a rush on the part of the dozens of performers to get to their various places at the long tables that had been spread in the dining tent.

Of course some of the high-priced artists, the stars in fact, lived at some hotel, the best the town afforded. They declined to mix with the "rabble" as possibly they secretly termed the main lot of circus attaches. But this was exactly what Jack most wanted to experience, for he intended having a series of pictures showing just how meals were served in these great traveling shows.

Martesa was beckoning to them as they entered the "dining hall," to give it a dignified name, though from the merry scramble that was taking place it seemed very much like a "free-for-all" scrimmage, where the winners would get served, and those less lucky find themselves compelled to take the leavings.

Apparently, the clown had been told beforehand that he was to take the three boys under his wing at meal times, until they had grown accustomed to their strange surroundings. La Belle

Rosa actually smiled sweetly at them, too, as they pushed their way in the direction of the three seats that were being reserved for them there.

Martesa must have taken a decided liking to the boys, for he even gave up his own seat in order that he might take another bringing him in contact with Oscar and Jack, one on his right hand and the other on his left, with the pretty little maid of the ring between Jack and Ballyhoo Jones.

He also saw to it that those who served the food did not neglect the new guests. Indeed, since the news had been flashed around camp that these enterprising camera boys were to form a part of the traveling show for a time, while they filled numerous films with motion pictures of various scenes, so that these could be shown on the screen in thousands of theatres, everybody seemed interested in them and their intended work.

Ballyhoo was already deeply interested in little Rosa. She chattered away like a magpie with him as she ate her supper, and he soon found that while on the bills she might appear as a prodigy utterly devoid of fear, in private she was really a shrinking little girl.

Once when Ballyhoo chanced to mention the stern ring-master he saw her cheeks go suddenly pale. This caused him to remember what Major Barley had said about the "bullyragging" tactics of the man who wielded the whip in the ring, and was master of ceremonies.

"You don't like Mr. Lionel Carew, then, I guess, Rosa," Ballyhoo said in a low tone.

"I *hate* him!" she said, almost fiercely.

"Why, what has he done to make you feel that way?" he asked; "I hope now he didn't forget himself and by mistake give you a touch of his miserable old whip?"

"Yes, that's what he did once," she replied, bitterly, "and it left a mark about my ankle for a long time; but the rest of the boys threatened to mutiny if ever it happened again, and it never did. You see, Major Barley seems to be under the thumb of his ring-master, we all believe; but he did set his foot down flat that time, and said that he'd do something *terrible* if Mr. Carew ever forgot himself again, because it would break up his show. But then I didn't mind his cutting *me* with his whip so much; it is the way he takes it out on poor Dad."

Of course, Ballyhoo understood who was meant by that affectionate word; indeed, from all accounts old Martesa had played the part of father to the little foundling from the very hour that as a babe she had been found in the big round-top tent.

"It's plain to be seen this ring-master must be a brute," muttered the indignant boy; "tell me what he has been doing to your good Dad, Rosa."

"He detests us both, because of the calling down he had after that display of ugly temper," she explained, "and he never loses a chance to cut Dad with some remark that eats in to his heart. You see, at that time I was hurt with his whip, Dad, forgetting his position, rushed at the ring-master,

and succeeded in giving him a blow that knocked him down and blacked his eye. Others were gathering, so Mr. Carew thought it best to get away before they all picked on him; but he's never forgotten nor forgiven Dad that blow. He often says he'll chase him out of the company yet, and I'm afraid he will; I'm very much afraid."

"I wouldn't worry about that," said the compassionate Ballyhoo. "You've got all the troupe back of you, yes, and the owner in the bargain."

"Oh! but he has a following here in the circus, a number of the men are in his power, I sometimes think, from the way they act. There's that Hernandez for one, who looks at me as if he could eat me, or give me to his lions for a meal. I don't know why he should feel that way, because I've always spoken fair with him. But there have been times when I've seen him talking with Mr. Carew, and I believe Dad and I must have been the subject of their conversation."

All this was intensely interesting to Ballyhoo, who dearly loved to wrestle with anything that had to do with a mystery. The more he looked into the appealing face of the little girl-rider the stronger grew his brave intention to do whatever was possible to assist her. Then there was the old clown, what a wonderfully tender heart he seemed to have; his very voice suggested that he could not hate any one.

"He's surely a fine old fellow," the boy told himself, as he listened to Martesa talking close by, "and his troubles, instead of souring him on the

world, have made his character only the more lovable. I'm mighty glad we came to meet such interesting people the first thing."

The strange meal was finished at last, and as the evening performance would begin in another half-hour there was a scurrying around of those whose duties took them into the ring with the opening act.

"Well, how are you getting on, boys?" asked Major Barley, as he hurried by on an errand of some sort.

"As fine as silk, sir," replied Jack, instantly. "And we've enjoyed our first supper under the Big Round-top immensely. No complaints coming, Major."

"Good enough, Jack. Make yourselves right at home, and come to me when you are ready to begin business. We'll arrange for the first picture at your convenience, any time after to-night. You can find berths aboard one of our sleepers; or perhaps you'll want to travel to the next town in your own car?"

"That's what we figure on doing, sir," called out Jack.

"What ails you, Ballyhoo?" demanded Oscar, presently; "you haven't said a single word for ten minutes. Must have talked yourself out at supper time; I noticed that you didn't pay much attention to anything but little Rosa."

"Well, I own up that I'm a heap interested in that child," admitted Ballyhoo, with all the airs of one who had reached the mature age of seven-

teen. "The more I think about her being left in the circus tent as a baby the stronger it appeals to me. Say, if I get half a chance I'm meaning to try to learn the secret of her birth. Wouldn't it be scrumptuous now if only we could discover that Rosa is really the daughter of some rich widow who's been mourning her as dead all these years? Laugh if you want to, Jack, but stranger things than that have happened before now. And if ever I do get a clue I'm going to make both of you help me learn the truth."

"Oh! we'll promise you that, all right, Ballyhoo," said Jack; "but better go slow or you'll get in trouble with Martesa next. There, that's the band starting to play, so we might as well get our seats before the main crowd comes along."

CHAPTER VII

WATCHING THE SHOW

THIS time they passed directly through the tent that held the wonderful collection of wild animals, gathered from the four corners of the earth. Ballyhoo Jones, of course, used his eyes to advantage while making this passage, and waved his hand airily toward the elephant, which, perhaps by mere accident, at that very instant elevated his trunk and actually trumpeted.

“Oh! did you hear that?” bubbled Ballyhoo, excitedly, “I really believe old Jumbo the Second recognized me! That must have been his idea of a *salute*. Tell me an elephant doesn’t know his best friends, will you?”

Fortified with plenty of peanuts for a side diversion, the trio of boys settled themselves in their seats to observe all that went on.

The big tent was really packed full when with a grand burst of music the cavalcade of riders came streaming into the ring, to show their skill on prancing circus horses. Then followed all kinds of fancy riding that excited the admiration of the country boys. Then came the waltzing

horse; succeeded by the wild race, with much leaping over barriers. The act ended in a blaze of glory, and much fervid enthusiasm on the part of the sympathetic audience.

Then followed other equally fine displays. Acrobats, gymnasts and tumblers took the ring, together with a tight-rope walker who stood at the top of her balancing profession.

But at least Ballyhoo was enjoying himself to his full bent. He clapped his hands until they burned from the effort. When the audience gave a performer a cheer of approval after some unusually difficult feat which had been successfully negotiated, Ballyhoo joined in the whooping; and he had such a way of letting out a volume of sound that nervous people near by were fain to clap their fingers in their ears. The circus calliope that led the procession in the street parade had nothing on Ballyhoo Jones when he chose to exert that strident voice of his.

At last was announced the appearance of La Belle Rosa. Then Ballyhoo fell strangely silent. The fact of the matter was he found his heart pumping at a highly accelerated pace, so that it knocked against his ribs; for somehow the boy was possessed of a fear lest the little girl rider meet with an accident.

He watched her on the back of the horse as she rode around, and smiled so sweetly at the applauding audience. Ballyhoo fretted, and wondered why people did not have better sense than to clap their hands and call out and kiss their fingers to

little Rosa, when all that row might frighten her horse.

The girl did her part very handsomely. She jumped through several hoops covered with white paper, to land safely upon the back of her galloping steed. Once Ballyhoo thought she slipped just a trifle, and the way his fingers closed spasmodically on the arm of Jack, who sat next to him on the left.

After that came other splendid acts. Oscar and Jack were highly pleased. They realized that the Barley circus had, indeed, lost nothing of its immense popularity; and that those who were connected with the exhibition were artists at the top of their profession.

"Say, we'll be able to get a lot of cracking good pictures when we make a start at business," Jack was saying, as they watched the Brazilian lion-tamer with the Portuguese name snap his whip, forcing his pets to build animal pyramids, and perform all sorts of other wonderful stunts, roaring all the while in a manner to freeze the blood in the veins of timid people.

Oscar was of a similar mind. At the same time, not being wholly given over to the one grand idea like Jack, he could enjoy watching what was going on.

All through the performance, Martesa, the favorite old clown, was on deck, convulsing the audience with his tricks and humor. It might have been observed that when La Belle Rosa was in the ring the veteran clown took an active part in what-

ever went on. He insisted on handling one of the paper rings through which the girl leaped, as though he meant to make her safety sure.

While some of the later acts were on, the canvasmen connected with the circus were busily engaged. Every man knew what he had to do, and they worked with the steadiness of machines. Already the menagerie had vanished, and by now most of the inmates of the cages, as well as the elephants, camels and other wild animals had been loaded on flat cars that went to make up a long train.

"Let's drop out of here, boys," remarked Oscar, presently, while another band of Japanese athletes entertained the audience. "We want to see something of how they get away from a town after a show, and load the cars with the animal cages."

"That's a fact!" cried Ballyhoo.

"Besides," added Oscar, with a wink of his eye toward Jack, "I've thought I'd like to ask our good friend and new acquaintance Martesa, if he wouldn't prefer riding across country with us in the car to being stuffed in a poor sleeper, along with all the rest of the chattering company."

"Oh!" gasped Ballyhoo, explosively, "Oscar, do you mean that for the little girl, too? Why, if you think it necessary I'll hang on to the step, so as to accommodate. That's mighty nice of you, Oscar, sure it is. They must get awful tired of being bounced around in those third-class sleepers night after night, and then have to give two performances each day besides."

Once outside and the boys were amazed at the remarkable changes that had taken place since they entered the Big Round-top. The menagerie had disappeared as if by magic, strings of horses were being led away, all the side-shows but a few had also departed, and there was beginning to be an air of acute desolation abroad that must have proven very sad to the small boys of the town.

Hurrying around to the rear of the circus tent, still brilliantly lighted up, they found that most of the performers were still there, though by this time dressed in their ordinary clothes.

Martesa himself came hurrying along, as though anxious to get rid of his chalk and paint and ridiculous garments, so he could appear as an ordinary human being once more for a brief spell. Oscar found himself realizing that after a clown has played his part year after year it must become very monotonous to him. He wondered whether old Martesa ever dreamed of spending his later years in some position that would be very different from the hurly burly of his whole former life.

"We were looking for you, Mr. Simpson," said Oscar, as he stopped the veteran clown. "The fact of the matter is we have room in our car for you and your little girl, and if you'd prefer to make the run across country with us, we'd like to have you along first rate."

This generous proposition seemed to affect Martesa very much, for there was a little catch in his voice when, after thinking it over for a brief time, he accepted the offer with sincere thanks.

"Where will I meet you when I've made my toilet, and pick up a grip, together with my little girl?" he asked Oscar.

"We'll get our apparatus packed in the car first," explained the other, "and you will find us waiting for you over yonder by that corner. We have a bright moon, you notice, and the ride across to Metuchen, which is only thirty-three miles away by road, ought to be fairly pleasant."

So it was arranged, and the boys hurried off to carry out their work. Oscar and Jack knew just how to pack the camera and other fixtures so that they would occupy the least possible space. Thus Ballyhoo was informed that he would not be compelled to "ride on the rail, or hang to the stepping board."

"It was pretty decent of you to propose such a thing, though," suggested Oscar, nudging Jack in the side, "and we're not going to forget how self-sacrificing you can be when it comes to accommodating an old gentleman, Ballyhoo."

In due time the pair made their appearance. The clown looked unusually radiant, and Oscar fancied that he gladly welcomed the chance to get away even for a brief time, from associations that reminded him of his daily grind.

CHAPTER VIII

A CHANGE OF BASE

COZILY bundled up in plenty of rugs, little Rosa cuddled against the arm of the big-hearted clown, who all her young life had acted the part of guardian and father to the waif of the circus. She was evidently very tired, for she had little to say.

Ballyhoo Jones sat alongside Oscar on the front seat, while Jack was with the two guests. The apparatus had been secured, so that it did not crowd things; and as they started off every one seemed pleased.

"To-morrow night," Jack was saying, "I expect to get busy and take some pictures if the weather is decent. First of all I want to get the departure of the circus with all the interesting phases from loading the animals on the cars to taking down the big tent. Those are things few persons have ever seen, because they hurry home after the show, and I believe they'll make a big hit."

Oscar guided the big car along, not trying to make any unnatural speed, for they were in no hurry, and could easily afford to spend one or two

hours on the road. Even then they would be in time to get seven hours' sleep before breakfast time, after reaching the hotel to which he meant to take his charges.

The car made very little noise as it ran, and conversation could easily be carried on between the inmates. Before twenty minutes had passed the clown announced that Rosa was sound asleep. He drew the wraps closer around her, and Jack could not but notice how tenderly this was done, proving that had the girl actually been his own child Martesa could not have loved her more.

"This is a great treat to me, I am telling you," the old clown went on to say, and there was a ring of sincerity in his voice that Jack liked to catch. "We some of us grow so tired of those stuffy cars, and all the noise. As the years pass on I find the old life growing more and more distasteful to me; but," with a sigh, "I suppose I must keep along in the same rut until I drop in the harness. I've never been able to accumulate much money, so as to think of retiring," and another heavy sigh accompanied those last words.

"If you had your way then, sir," remarked Jack, "I suppose you would also take your little ward out of this circus life?"

"Yes, indeed, such is my foolish dream, that will never be realized, I suppose," the old man hastily replied. "I grow to hate the life more and more every day; it is so fictitious, so full of froth and excitement. Circus people live on their nerves, and mine are near the breaking point I

fear. Nothing would please me more than a chance to settle down on some quiet farm amidst rural scenes. My soul yearns for life that would be just the opposite of what has always been my portion."

And Oscar, listening, began to wonder how he might manage in some way to bring that little dream of the almost worn-out old clown true.

"How do you think *she* would like such a thing?" continued Jack, seeking further information.

"She would be very happy," Martesa told him, quickly. "She is not enamoured with the life of the show, as some people might think. In fact, the child has cried many a time because I forced her to take up the life, not knowing how else to keep her with me all the while. Then again she dreads certain things connected with this particular show. The ring-master is very cruel, and seems to have taken a spite against both of us, I'm sure I don't know just why."

After that the old man himself fell silent. Perhaps he was indulging in dreams of the happy day when he might find himself forever freed from the chains that had so long bound him to this strange nomadic life against his will.

Mile after mile was passed over. Oscar was a very careful driver and there fortunately did not happen to be any breakdown on the part of the engine; so in due time they arrived at the town of Metuchen, where, according to the posters on the walls the big show was slated to give two perform-

ances on the day following the departure from Provincetown.

"Here we are at the Red Clover House," announced Oscar, as they drew up before quite an imposing long building, evidently a hotel; "and remember, Mr. Simpson, both of you are my guests while stopping in this town. Please don't attempt to say anything against it, because I'm a spoiled boy, and accustomed to having my own way."

The girl was awake by now and, doubtless, well pleased to know that for a change she would have a comfortable and clean bed in a hotel, instead of the customary unsanitary berth in an old sleeping coach, which she shared in company with two dozen other members of the circus company.

Their rooms were all that could be asked for, and Oscar felt pleased. Ballyhoo Jones was keeping unusually quiet just now, but nevertheless the boy appeared to be doing more or less thinking. And for all that Oscar knew it was possible his thoughts were also along the line of a strong desire to figure out how he might do something to bring a little sunshine into the lives of Martesa and his ward.

It was Jack after all who aroused the others in the morning; for they had a room in common, with two large beds in it; since all the other accommodations had been reserved for quite a number of the higher-paid artists connected with the circus.

"Better get up, fellows," he told them, after he had given each a shake in turn. "It's nearly

eight o'clock, and you know we said we'd join Martesa and Rosa at breakfast about that time."

Ballyhoo was out and dressed in a hurry. Still, the others must remember that his appetite always seemed "on edge," and perhaps it was the fact of his being furiously hungry that caused him to finish dressing long before either of his companions had completed their labors along that line.

"See you downstairs, boys," he told them, as he hurried out of the room. "I'll ask them to save something for you, of course."

A merry laugh wafted after him told Ballyhoo that his crafty expedient had not deceived the others in the least.

When Jack and Oscar arrived a little later they found that the second breakfast had just been placed on the table. This was intended for the circus people, who must have a chance to make up lost sleep.

A number of them had arrived about an hour after the boys struck town, coming in on an express train. At the long table Oscar recognized the Brazilian lion-tamer, Senor Hernandez; the Leopard Woman, M'lle Aime; Mr. Carew, the ring-master, looking as severe as when carrying out his onerous duties during a performance, and some five or six other performers.

Some of these high-priced people looked at each other when they saw Martesa and the girl rider enter the room in company with the three boys; but they understood how it came about, and said

nothing. In fact, most of the people of the show had only sincere regard for the veteran clown, and love for the little waif.

Oscar again noticed the frown on the handsome face of Mr. Carew as he glanced slyly from time to time at Martesa and Rosa. It gave the boy much cause for speculation. He found himself wondering whether this queer dislike which the ring-master had come to entertain toward so harmless a couple as the clown and his ward could possibly have any connection with the mystery surrounding little Rosa.

Evidently while the ring-master had to mingle with his people at hotels, on the road he held himself aloof from them, and did not join in the merry chatter that went around the table as breakfast was disposed of.

Now and then he would make some remark, or reply to a question asked, it might be by the champion lady bareback rider, who did not seem to share in the general fear of the autocrat of the ring. The boys had learned that Mr. Carew was really a nephew of old Mr. Barley, and had some interest in the show. To see how he usually ran things to suit himself, and over-rode the orders of the veteran proprietor, some began to suspect that in truth Mr. Carew was the real boss.

The boys determined to get busy and take their first reel of pictures that day, since the weather was so exceedingly fine.

"We must catch the show on parade to begin with," said Jack; "that is a starting point. Then

to-night, if conditions are favorable, we'll tackle another reel covering what takes place after the evening performance is under full swing—showing how the canvasmen work taking things down, and loading them on the train so as to get away in a hurry. And the last scene must be when they drop the Big Round-top—how few persons have ever seen that done, not even Ballyhoo Jones here, I expect."

"Oh! yes, I have!" exclaimed the party indicated. "I spent the better part of a night watching everything that went on one time when there was a show in our town. But then, of course, that didn't *begin* to compare with this immense Barley aggregation of marvels and wonders. It'll be a bully sight for me, I tell you, boys. And I'm having the greatest time of my whole life right now. I'll never be able to express how joyful I am over being given the chance to tag along with you."

"Oh! you're paying us back full price for every thing we've done, Ballyhoo," Oscar assured him, fervently; "we needed just such a jolly chum as you to keep us company."

So the day started in with a bustle, and when the parade commenced to wind its tortuous way through the streets of Metuchen, with that shrieking calliope at the head of the procession, the three chums had their first opportunity to make use of the new motion picture camera so as to secure a series of views of the gallant showing made by Barley's Circus, the "Greatest on Earth," as the posters solemnly affirmed.

CHAPTER IX

AN ACCIDENT AND A THRILL

"THERE, that job's finished," remarked Jack, with a great sigh of relief, as the three of them started back toward the hotel along about midday; "and unless I'm a whole lot mistaken we've captured a splendid lot of stirring views that will give immense satisfaction."

"Er—you don't think there could be any chance now," ventured Ballyhoo Jones, in a hesitating way, "that you skipped the principal event in all the long parade, do you, Jack?"

At that the other laughed.

"Oh! our good friend Martesa appears several times in the reel," Jack assured him, with a wink at Oscar; and then quickly relenting he hastened to add: "and as for little Rosa, she'll be seen as pretty as a picture waving her hand to you, Ballyhoo; for I caught her just in the act."

Ballyhoo gave his head a shake as he hastened to say:

"Oh! I don't care how much you guy me, so long as you've caught the little girl at her best, seated on that gaily caparisoned horse. Every-

body will want to know who she is; and that is what's going to advertise her, so that she'll become more famous, and command a bigger salary as she grows older."

"Perhaps, though," remarked Oscar, casually, "little Rosa and Martesa may not stay in the profession always."

Ballyhoo started, and looked keenly at the speaker, but Oscar did not see fit to explain his mysterious words.

Later on the afternoon performance began. Jack had made up his mind that he was apt to get better results at the night show, when a myriad of lamps gave an illumination that could not be found during the matinee, at which time objects were apt to look more or less dim, owing to the canvas keeping the sunlight out to a great extent.

Accordingly, he spent most of the time calculating as to what acts were most worthy of perpetuation on the film, and which ones might be omitted without much loss. In settling this matter the boy had to use considerable good judgment, and his former apprenticeship to his father, who had been a skilled photographer, came in handy.

Oscar had already asked Martesa to accompany them again in the car, but for some reason the old clown begged him to excuse them. He gave as his excuse that he feared the proprietor and Mr. Carew might not like members of the company to stray away from the rest. Oscar wondered whether the ring-master might not have said something hateful along these lines to Martesa, for he

seemed never to lose an opportunity to hurt the old man's feelings.

But then Oscar was just as determined as ever that he would do something for the new friends in whose fortunes he had taken such a deep interest. Unknown to either of his companions, Oscar had that very afternoon written a long and earnest letter to his genial guardian, telling him all that had happened, and urging him to fix it so that Martesa might be offered a position at the end of the season's contract that would fill his heart with joy.

The afternoon performance went off without a hitch, and this always puts everybody connected with the show in extra good humor. Even the ring-master seemed to frown less than usual, Oscar thought, as he watched Mr. Carew snap his whip, and control the working in the ring.

"There's certainly something queer in the way he watches little Rosa all the time," Oscar was telling himself toward the end of the performance. "And never once have I seen the ghost of a smile on his face when he looks at her. Yes, and Rosa, on her part, fears that man more than she does any one else on earth, though she doesn't just know why, poor child. Something down in her heart tells her he is her enemy. I wonder why he should be. It's mighty strange, that's what."

Later on as the boys were resting in their room (Oscar having made all arrangements with Major Barley, who had showed up during the afternoon, for an extra illumination on the coming night so

that several series of pictures might be run off), Ballyhoo evinced more or less curiosity concerning their immediate future movements.

"You're meaning to get the entraining act to-night, I understand, Jack?" he started to say.

"If everything goes well with us, I may," the operator told him. "Might as well make hay while the sun shines, because you never can tell when a storm will come swooping along. And I imagine there ought to be some stunning scenes in the work of breaking camp. I calculate to snap off a series that will give satisfaction to millions of people who've often wanted to see how a circus leaves town on the jump."

"And after we've got that fixed," continued Ballyhoo, "will we start across country again like we did last night? I understand that the next stop is going to be Branchville; that's how far away from here, Oscar?"

"About forty miles, I believe, and with poor roads part of the way, that I'd rather travel over in daylight than by night. By the way, I asked Martesa to go along with us again, but he declined."

Ballyhoo uttered an exclamation of disappointment.

"I'm right sorry for that, boys," he remarked. "I don't see why he wouldn't take you up on that offer, Oscar. We made it comfy for both of them, didn't we?"

"Oh! he said he was a thousand times obliged for all we had done," returned the other; "I imag-

ine it's something like pride that keeps him from accepting. Even an old clown can have pride you know, and not want to feel under too heavy an obligation to those who are almost strangers to him."

"Why, I feel just as if I'd known both of them for years," asserted Ballyhoo, stoutly. "I think Mr. Simpson is as fine a man as I ever met; and I'd love to see him looking happy. He certainly has had a hard life of it, always making people roar; and yet when he isn't in the ring he looks so sorrowful it gives me a queer feeling about my heart."

"I've got a dim idea," continued Oscar, thoughtfully, as he shook his head in a half puzzled fashion, "that Martesa is afraid of giving offense to that Carew if he leaves the rest of the troupe and goes with us. I imagine he's been called down already and hauled over the coals on account of it."

So night came along, and they had their apparatus all arranged for business. Jack had exercised his good judgment as to the location to select, in order to get the full benefit of the illumination without the lights blurring the pictures. Oscar was to stay beside him so as to render any assistance necessary, but Ballyhoo felt at liberty to find a lodgment near the border of the ring, where he could see all that went off at close quarters.

All the performers in the show had been told beforehand that they were expected to do their

very best on this night, because some of the scenes were to be featured as the leading attractions of the times. No one knew whether his or her act would fall under this head, but each certainly put an unusual amount of vim into the work.

Martesa, the veteran clown, beloved by tens of thousands of children all over the wide land, and numerous persons as well, would, of course, figure in one of these fragments of the film. And to be sure the complete act of little La Belle Rosa must occupy another space. Then some of the wonderful gymnasts and tumblers would make a splendid showing; together with the trained elephants; the monkeys that rode on the backs of the racing ponies, and looked so comical in their jockey garb; the educated dogs that never failed to gain great applause, and several other acts deserving of especial mention.

As the performance went on Jack announced that so far as he could tell everything was working in a wholly satisfactory manner.

"I'm getting the boss a lot of pictures, let me tell you, Oscar," he remarked, with a ring of pride in his profession to be detected in his voice.

"Well, here comes the best of the bunch," laughed the other, and immediately a clamor of tongues, accompanied by much hand clapping, announced that La Belle Rosa, the clever little rider, was entering the ring, seated on her horse.

"Seems to me that's a different animal from the steady-going old plug she generally uses," remarked Jack, a trifle uneasily, as he started grind-

ing away, for he wanted to catch that wild waving of hats and handkerchiefs on the part of the throng and the happy way the pretty little girl was nodding her head to the applause that greeted her entrance.

"I hope it's just as reliable," added Oscar; "but I don't just like the way it acts. That beast has considerable more fire about him than the piebald one. Then the band starting up again seems to excite the brute somewhat. There, they are off. I hope nothing happens to the child to-night; but no matter, Jack, don't you stop work, for it's all in the life of the circus people."

The girl rider went through some of the ordinary feats that seemed so wonderful to the audience, when they considered her youthful appearance. She was evidently having more or less trouble with her mount, although Jack felt that her performance was really enhanced by this fact. Round after round of cheers followed, each time she finished one of her difficult feats.

There came a time, however, when the horse she stood upon made some sort of a false move, for which the girl was not prepared. The audience held its breath in horror when La Belle Rosa toppled over backward, and her foot catching in some trailing part of the pad on the animal's back, it looked dreadfully as though the child might be dragged along at the now frightened horse's heels!

CHAPTER X

BRAVO! LITTLE ROSA!

"KEEP working, Jack!"

Almost mechanically the boy who was manipulating the motion picture camera continued to turn the handle of his machine. He was too far away from the arena to be of the least good. The only thing that occurred to him was to catch what was going on in order to preserve it as a most striking example of the perils that beset those who do their daily stunt in the circus ring.

The vast audience as one man seemed to comprehend the sudden danger that hung over the head of the pretty child rider. The people seemed to rise to their feet like a great wave, so that in a second everybody stood. You have seen, possibly, something similar occur at a critical baseball game when so much depended on a safe drive, and as bat smote ball there came an instantaneous uprising in the endeavor to see where the horsehide sphere had been driven.

A strange sound as of horror and awe combined, swept around the tented pavilion. Hearts beat with sudden sympathy as a realization of the

child's terrible position burst upon the consciousness of men and women.

Unfortunately, Martesa, the faithful old clown, happened to be at the other side of the ring just then. He saw what had occurred, and though his heart must have, figuratively, been in his mouth with a spasm of fear, this did not prevent him from instantly starting across. He held out both hands appealingly as he staggered rather than ran, for a great weakness seemed to seize upon him that almost palsied his limbs.

Mr. Carew, the ring-master, was much closer, but he could not have stopped the horse even though he tried, until the girl had been dragged halfway around the tanbark circle.

But fortune was kind.

Even as those who sprang to their feet as if on springs gave that one frightened look they saw that it was all over but the shouting. Some one who had been on the border of the upraised bank of earth that fashioned the circle in which the performance was taking place had rolled over the incline, stumbled half erect just as the horse came along, made a blind stab upward with one hand, gripped the bridle close to the bit, hung on like a leach.

"Keep grinding away, Jack!" roared Oscar, only fearful now that the other might be so overcome by his excitement and joy that he would forget his part in the big "scoop," and spoil the wonderful picture by slackening his efforts.

Then came a ripple of applause as the first to

recover their voices found tongue. This gradually increased as others joined in, until a perfect roar ascended. The band, too, started to do a lively series of shrieks and thumps and fantastic wails with the full power of cornet, drum and every other species of instrument.

Seldom had human ears listened to such a tumult of sound. Men seemed to almost go crazy with the satisfaction that gripped them as they saw the horse thus brought to a standstill, and realized that the favorite little rider could not have been seriously injured.

"Look! oh! look! if it wasn't our own Ballyhoo Jones who did that great stunt!" almost shrieked Jack.

"Don't let up a second in your grinding, Jack!" shouted the other, seemingly only concerned just then in the successful outcome of that thrilling picture of life's sunshine and shadows in the circus arena. "Keep it up right along! See that you get our chum in all right. And was there ever such a wild crowd featured before? Oh! this picture alone will make you famous, I tell you! More power to your elbow, Jack; and if you're getting tired let me chip in a spell."

But the other only shook his head as if to indicate that he had full command of the situation, and needed no assistance in carrying out his part.

Oscar now became intensely interested in what was being enacted in the arena. He saw that La Belle Rosa was on her feet. So far as outward appearances went she had not been injured to any

extent, for she took several steps, and seemed to be somewhat confused by the tremendous din that was still welling up all around.

The ring-master walked hurriedly toward her. His face looked black as though he might be furious because of the accident, even though it was only such as may happen at any time during an act.

But before this old Martesa had reached the side of the girl, and gathered Rosa in his trembling arms. When the ring-master came up the clown put himself squarely in front of the dismounted rider, and looked Mr. Carew in the face.

Perhaps even the angry man could see some sort of slowly awakening fire in those usually mild blue eyes of the clown. The painted face of Martesa was hardly the one to inspire fear, but something must have warned the ring-master that he had better go slow unless he wanted to bring down on his head the fury that threatened.

Oscar saw the man say something, but, of course, could only guess what the tenor of his communication might be. Martesa replied in turn, and then turned toward the girl.

Oscar saw La Belle Rosa shake her head. She was determined then to accomplish the feat she had been attempting at the time that unfortunate stumble on the part of the horse had caused her to lose her footing and fall. The audience must have sensed her decision, for immediately cheers began to rise once more.

"She's meaning to try again, Jack!" cried the

delighted Oscar, "bless her brave little heart. Such a trifle as that doesn't faize her any, let me tell you. Getting it all, are you, old fellow? Oh! but this is going to beat the record for a real thriller, and it'll make the girl famous in the bargain. Steady now, she's going to get up again, Jack. Keep grinding away like everything, that's all!"

It was just as Oscar said, for the girl after so resolutely declining to abandon her share in the night's entertainment called out to Ballyhoo Jones to release his grim hold on the animal.

The ring-master cracked his whip at the same time, understanding what she intended to do. The circus horse immediately started off at its customary lumbering pace, being well drilled. It evidently knew what was expected of a four-footed performer—just a jogging lope, always circling the arena at the same steady pace until given the signal to stop.

"She intends to spring up on to his back when he comes around again, Jack!" cried the excited Oscar. "Be sure you catch that part of it good and square. Ready now! Oh! I hope nothing gets in the way. Sit down there, please; don't you see you're blocking us off?"

Oscar leaned forward and gave the tall countryman, who had raised his figure in the way, a shove to one side.

By now the lumbering circus horse had arrived opposite to where Martesa and the little rider stood awaiting him. La Belle Rosa started run-

ning, her agile feet tripping over the tanbark nimbly. Then just at the proper second she raised her hand, seized upon some object intended for her assistance under such conditions, and with a flying leap gained a seat upon the pad on the horse's broad back.

Once more did the whoops and cheers break forth. "Well done, Rosa!" shouted Oscar, although it was exceedingly doubtful whether his voice could be heard above the general din.

Nevertheless, it seemed as though the girl waved her hand directly toward the elevated spot where he and Jack were standing; and when she kissed her tiny hand, it was squarely at Oscar.

Now she was standing again, and the attendants began to prepare the banners over which the little rider meant to leap, to land again on the back of her steed.

There were three of the banners, and two men held each one. Martesa, the clown, and a groom manipulated the last of the lot. Twice the horse circled the ring, and the child made the jump successfully. This may have been the usual allotment, but once more she started around. The attendants who had begun to descend from their low pedestals scurried back again, possibly under a quick command of the watchful ring-master.

"Steady, now, Jack, don't let up on your life!" shrilled Oscar, positive that something worth while was coming.

One, two banners were safely jumped, and but a single one remained. Oscar's heart ceased beat-

ing temporarily, and his nails dug deep into the palms of his clenched hands, for he saw the child crouch, and then leaping high in the air turn a complete somersault, to land safely on her feet on the back of the horse, and wave her hand jauntily toward the now roaring audience.

Another moment and she had sprung to the ground, where Martesa was waiting to seize upon her. No doubt the poor old clown had suffered agonies in that second of time when he saw his pet attempt something that was usually left to veteran riders, and which she had certainly never before tried in public.

Then Jack stopped grinding. He was utterly exhausted, what with the continuity of his work and the intense excitement under which he had labored. But never once had his hand faltered, and unless something unexpected happened to that film it was surely bound to be a "winner."

"That's enough of this inside business for tonight, Jack!" declared Oscar.

"Just what I was thinking myself," replied the other. "Let's get out and see what's doing outside. By now they must be clearing the menagerie, and loading the wild beasts on the flat cars. My film is just about exhausted, I notice, so I'll load up again for a new start, given a few minutes. So come along, let's get a move on, Oscar, old chap."

CHAPTER XI

WHEN THE "BIG ROUND-TOP" CAME DOWN

WHEN Oscar could catch the eye of Ballyhoo Jones, he made a sign that was understood by the other. It meant that he was to meet them outside the Big Round-top with as little delay as possible.

When Jack and Oscar managed to make their way out, which they did only after considerable difficulty, on account of the dense crowd, they found that it was as they had suspected. The menagerie tent was not only partly empty but in the process of demolition.

Jack was keenly alive to the possibilities offered to a wide-awake operator of a motion picture camera. That practiced eye of his seized upon the finest scenes of the lot, with a proper amount of illumination to save them from being undertoned. Any one less practiced in the art of picture taking might have easily neglected some of the most important necessities for success; and as a result met with keen disappointment later on when the reel was developed, and tested, to be found "wanting."

Then next they hastened to the station where the train was being loaded, hoping to secure snatches

of lively pictures there calculated to show just how this most important operation was carried out by the experienced and well-trained corps of canvasmen and packers.

Ballyhoo Jones found them there at work when he finally managed to force his way out of the packed tent. He looked rather weary, and Oscar, suspecting the cause, lost no time in plying him with questions.

"Were you held up, Ballyhoo, and did some of the folks recognize you as the fellow who caught little Rosa's horse just in the nick of time?" he demanded.

"That's just what they did, Oscar," admitted the other, somewhat confused, and feeling of his right hand tenderly. "Say, those big country yahoes have got a most powerful grip, let me tell you. They squeezed my hand till I nearly groaned. Why, I never dreamed anybody would recognize *me*. What I did wasn't worth shucks after all, just grabbed that tame old horse's bridle, and hung on."

"Well," laughed Oscar, "if you will play the hero part in the circus drama why you've got to take what comes with it."

Most of the cages had been trundled up on the flat cars by the time Jack managed to get busy, so that he had to promise himself that on another occasion he would get around earlier in the evening so as to catch the tide in full swing.

"The one special thing I want to capture tonight," he told Oscar, "is the dropping of the Big

Round-top. Everybody's heard about that wrinkle, but how few ever saw how it was done. So let's walk back to the circus grounds again, boys."

On the way they met a few of the performers, already dressed in their everyday clothes, and evidently heading for the train, so as to retire to their berths in the sleeper, and secure some sort of rest.

"Here comes Martesa and his girl!" suddenly announced Jack, who was carrying the camera, while the others managed the balance of the outfit between them.

Already had little Rosa discovered the trio of lads, for she was waving her hand toward them. The old clown immediately seized upon Ballyhoo, who knew he was in for another siege of hand-squeezing; though he deftly managed to offer the left set of digits, pretending that his other hand was occupied in gripping several bundles that had fallen to his lot to carry.

"It was splendidly done, my boy," said Martesa, with a quivering voice, as he wrung Ballyhoo Jones' hand, as the latter afterwards said, "just like a milkman would the pump handle that helped raise the standard of *quantity* in his cans."

"Oh! shucks! please don't say anything more about it, sir," spluttered the other, awkwardly.

"But no one could say what might not have happened if you had been less prompt," declared Martesa. "That horse isn't to be trusted like the regular one Rosa rides."

Well, Rosa was equal to the occasion. She

just darted forward, got up on her tiptoes, and before Ballyhoo Jones realized what was coming she had landed a great big kiss on his cheek.

"There, that shows how thankful I am for your assistance, kind sir," she laughingly told him; while both Oscar and Jack burst out into a loud laugh to see their chum blushed so furiously.

"We're heading for the station," explained the clown, himself more or less amused, no doubt, by the little scene, "for there is always a great rush after the show is over, and those who have berths find trouble in securing them. We hope to see all of you to-morrow at the next stop, for, of course, you are not yet through with your work?"

"Not by any means," replied Jack, quietly; "and you'll be interested in knowing that I think I've got a grand picture of that little near-tragedy of the arena to-night. You may think me a bit heartless to have kept on grinding away all through the happening, but an operator who takes motion pictures has to forget everything but his duty. No matter what happens, it means all the more that he should stick to his job, and get everything down on the film."

The old clown looked at the flushed face of the speaker and chuckled.

"I can plainly see right now, son," he started to say, "that you are built exactly for your chosen profession. No matter what personal danger hung over your head I fairly believe you'd stick to your allotted task. There are modern Casabiancas right among the people who take pictures; and

who would refuse to desert their post to even save their lives. Well, the best of luck go with you all; I am glad I've had the chance of knowing such a fine bunch of lads."

"And depend on it, Mr. Simpson," said Oscar, feelingly, "we are just as pleased at having the privilege of knowing you and little Rosa here. Later on I've got something that I want to talk over with you. Yes, we'll expect to see you both to-morrow. Good-night!"

Back the boys went to the circus grounds. They found that the performance was drawing to a close, and already squads of people began to pour forth from the exits. Scores of vehicles, and many cars, some of them ramshackle machines but serviceable for all that, stood around the immediate vicinity. These would carry hundreds of country people back to their farm homes; and, doubtless, some of them had traveled many miles, spurred on by the expectation of the great treat that came only once a year.

Before the grounds had been fairly cleared of the crowd the diligent canvasmen started work taking down the Big Round-top. The circus proprietor had given orders that all the illumination possible be kept up in order that the film might do justice to the lively scene. He was bustling about himself, for a wonder, seeing that things were being carried out to the best advantage; for shrewd man that he was Major Barley realized that a thing of this kind would be the greatest free advertisement ever attained.

Jack was kept busily employed for some little time, jumping this way and that in order to catch the many sides of the lowering of the tremendous canvas in sections. When they had seen the thing through, and the wagons were being packed so as to transport the material to the train, where it would be put aboard just as they had seen it stowed away, the three boys concluded that their work for that particular night was over.

"And let me tell you both," asserted Jack, as they made their way toward the hotel where they expected to put up again, starting for the next town after breakfast in the morning, "I believe we've done something worth while in the line of pictures to-night. I'm half crazy to learn how they turn out, and shall send the film away before we leave here, to have it developed. I'm glad I made all the arrangements in advance."

Reaching the hotel they carried their outfit along with them up to the room they occupied in common. The proprietor offered to give them each a separate compartment, since he had plenty of spare space, now that the circus people had gone; but the boys decided they did not care to bother making the change at that late hour.

"We're all good chums, anyway," laughed Jack, "and we know how to keep Ballyhoo from sleeping on his back, so he can't wake us up by snoring; so what's the use changing?"

Accordingly, they proceeded to get to sleep as soon as possible, for they had had a long and rather arduous day of it, all told.

A peaceful night followed, and nothing occurred to mar their rest. Long after the sun was up one of the boys happened to awaken, and soon had the others stirring. It chanced to be Jack who finished dressing first, and went downstairs to get a drink of fresh water at the well out in the yard.

Oscar and Ballyhoo Jones, a little while afterwards, followed the first chum to the lower story; and as breakfast did not seem to be quite ready they passed out on to the side porch to take a look at the weather.

Hardly had they emerged than Ballyhoo Jones was heard to give utterance to an exclamation of astonishment.

"What ails you now?" snapped Oscar, wondering if some new happening not down on the bills were about to descend upon them.

"It's Jack!" exclaimed the other, pointing his hand toward the rear of the hotel, where the stables and a big barn stood; "see how he's hurrying this way, and making gestures at us. Course, Jack may only be hungry, and afraid he's late to breakfast; but that look on his face makes me think it's more'n that."

Oscar himself feared that Ballyhoo Jones must be right, for he could see that the oncoming chum was greatly excited over something he had discovered.

CHAPTER XII

UNDERHAND WORK

"It's a hoodoo, that's what it is!" Jack was saying as he came panting to where the others had advanced to meet him, at the foot of the three steps leading up to the side porch of the hotel.

"Whatever do you mean?" demanded Oscar, certainly considerably bewildered by the odd exclamation of the other.

"Oh! look here, Jack," burst out Ballyhoo Jones, excitedly, "have you learned of a railroad wreck, and was the circus train smashed in a collision, tell us right away, can't you?"

"Not quite so bad as that," replied the other, immediately; "it's our crowd that's got a knock, and our means of transportation wrecked."

"Do you mean the car?" snapped Oscar.

"Just what I do," affirmed Jack. "Every blessed tire flat as a pancake on the ground, that's what they are!"

Oscar and Ballyhoo exchanged significant looks.

"Never heard of such a thing happening of itself to a car," said the latter indignantly; "one tire might let down, and on occasion a pair of

'em; but the whole lot, never. There's some sort of trickery about this, fellows."

"Oh! I meant to tell you that right away!" cried Jack. "You see, I looked around and I give you my word for it a knife has been used to slice each tire. It was about as nasty a sneak game as I've ever heard of."

"Our car was in the barn, all right," said Oscar, "but like as not they never think of locking the old place up, so any one could get in there. We'll go out with you, Jack, and see what the extent of the damage is."

Oscar seemed able to take things much more calmly than either of the others. He possibly had better command over his feelings; or it might be that the loss in a money sense did not cut any figure with him, as it might have done with either Jack or the third chum.

It required but a brief space of time for them to reach the barn. Here stood the big car in which they expected to cover considerable country while featuring the leading characteristics of circus life. And just as Jack had told the others the four tires were perfectly flat.

A hasty examination convinced Oscar that there had been nothing connected with chance or accident about the catastrophe. Some audacious and conscienceless rascal had certainly dug a knife into each tire, and not content with that in two instances he had made quite a slit along the hard rubber, which would require vulcanizing, perhaps, in order to remedy the injury.

“Fortunately, I noticed a repair shop only around the corner here, where some wide-awake chap does all such work on short notice,” Oscar remarked, first of all.

“But whoever in the wide world could have done this mean job?” asked Ballyhoo, as he fingered the slashes, and noted how vindictively the unknown miscreant had handled his instrument.

“Well, of course we don’t know,” remarked Oscar, “but that isn’t saying we won’t find out,” and he stooped as he spoke, to pick up some object that had evidently caught his wandering gaze.

“What’s that you’ve found?” demanded Jack curiously.

For answer the other opened his hand, and showed them quite a good-sized pocketknife with a horn handle, just such as any one might own who had frequent need of a serviceable tool.

“Unless I’m mighty much mistaken,” explained Oscar, “this is the identical knife that did the cutting. See, here when I open the big blade there’s still a trace of rubber sticking to it. Don’t brush that off, boys, for it may yet be the means of betraying the slick rascal who gave us this knock.”

“And Oscar,” added Jack, instantly, “there are initials scratched on the little German silver plate besides—you can make them out as easy as pie, B. M. that’s what they are. We’ll remember those letters, and try to find the owner of the knife among the circus hands.”

“What makes you think this coward who sneaks about in the dark, and does his dirty work on the

sly, must be connected with the show?" asked Ballyhoo Jones.

"Of course I'm only guessing, remember, because so far I haven't a single thing to go on," Jack hastened to explain; "but I'm nearly sure that the party who did this job was paid for it by some one else. Now, who is there that would have any reason to hate us for the friends we have made, and perhaps want to keep us away from the circus, for a while at least?"

"Huh! only party I can think of is that Mr. Carew, because he bears such an ugly grudge toward Martesa and little Rosa, and mebbe includes us in the crowd," Ballyhoo lost no time in asserting.

Somehow this seemed to strike both of the others as very plausible. Though they had absolutely no proof whatever with which to convict the ring-master, still somehow deep down in their hearts they condemned him.

"Yes, once we manage to discover the party who owns this telltale blade," Oscar went on to say, with a frown on his forehead, "I believe if he can be forced to confess who hired him he'll incriminate Mr. Carew."

"Something mighty queer," continued Ballyhoo Jones, reflectively, "about the way the ring-master feels toward the good old clown, whom nearly everybody loves; and then that sweet little girl who is looked upon as the Daughter of the Circus, as some of them put it. Let me tell you, boys, I've got a hunch his ugly feelings toward that pair

are founded on something deeper, and further back than just a little quarrel this summer."

"Keep on digging, Ballyhoo," advised Jack, with an encouraging grin, "and before you're done you'll have proven that little Rosa is the long lost princess; while Mr. Carew turns out to be the disappointed suitor who to have a dark revenge stole her when a baby, and left her in the Big Round-top twelve years and more ago."

"Oh! well, I'm not going to argue the matter with you, Jack!" said the other, scratching his head in a queer way he had when puzzled; "but all the same I'm meaning to keep my eyes about me right along after this, because you never can tell when you'll run across some clue that points the way to the answer. I'm great on clues, you must know. And right now, from the fine odor in the air I have a hunch that our breakfast is ready."

"Well, you two can go in and tackle it," said Oscar. "I've got a little business on hand that should be attended to first."

"You mean you want to run the car around to that shop, and have the man get busy repairing our tires, eh, Oscar?" Jack observed, shrewdly guessing the truth.

For answer Oscar started to speed the crank, and start the engine. Much to his relief there came an immediate answering sound; at least the intruder had not bothered trying to injure the working parts of the car.

"She's all right for running, that's one comfort!" exclaimed Jack, as Oscar proceeded to

jump in, and back the machine from the barn.

Oscar quickly reached the shop where he hoped to have the necessary repairs done. The owner was a wide-awake young fellow, who evidently knew his business. When Oscar saw that he had a helper he felt relieved, for that would mean more speed in finishing the work.

Naturally, the man was astonished to have any one show up with four flattened tires; but one glance told him there had been malicious destruction of property and not an accident.

"We had the car stored in the hotel barn," explained Oscar, "and some scoundrel in the night has amused himself by slashing all our tires. Please take a good look, and tell me just how long it will take you to make a good job of it. I'll pay you full price, and a third more for speed; but don't neglect to make them safe."

"I think I can let you have the car by ten o'clock at the latest, perhaps something less than that," the man told Oscar.

"I'm much obliged to you for making that promise," the latter went on to say, "so please get busy as soon as possible. I'll go over and join my two chums at breakfast."

"But if you had your car in the hotel barn, wouldn't Mr. Shaefer be responsible for the damages?" asked the repair man.

"Well, under ordinary conditions he might," replied the other, "but it happens that when we came here night before last he frankly told me he had no garage, and that I could put my car in one

a block away; or if I chose to store it in his barn he would not hold himself responsible if the place burned down, or anything else happened. So I said I'd take a chance, never dreaming that such a thing as this could happen. If I don't come around on time send word to the hotel when the repairs are completed. My name is Oscar Far-rar."

Oscar went over to the hotel. When the others saw the gratified expression on his face they knew it was all right.

"When will we be able to get out of here, Oscar?" asked Jack; "you know we have a pretty long run, and over poor roads at that, before we can expect to join our circus friends again."

"I guess by ten we'll be able to start," he assured the other; "and at that we're some lucky. It might have been a whole lot worse. That scamp could just as easily as not have ruined our engine so that it would be fit only for the scrap heap; though sometimes I even think that's the best that can be said of it right now."

"Please don't run that bully old car down, Oscar," pleaded Ballyhoo Jones; "for if you asked me I'd say that it has done right nobly. And I hope and expect to enjoy a ride of many hundreds of miles still with that old engine strumming away to beat the band. Here, have some ham and eggs; and, look at that pile of buckwheat cakes they're fetching you. Get busy and eat your money's worth, Oscar."

CHAPTER XIII

THE IMPENDING BLOW

AT just a quarter to ten that morning, while all of the boys were sitting on the porch enjoying the air, Oscar started to get up from his chair.

"Guess it's about time for me to step around to that machine shop, and see if the tire repairs are about finished," he remarked.

"No use bothering, Oscar!" exclaimed Ballyhoo Jones, immediately, "because there comes the machinist right now with our outfit. Seems that he got through a little sooner than he figured on."

Upon examination they found that the man had certainly made a first-class job of it; and Oscar gladly paid him the price agreed on. They had the camera and balance of their belongings handy, so it took them but a brief time to load up.

In spite of Oscar's familiarity with the cranking of the car it required exactly three efforts on the part of his skilled hand to secure results. But then that was nothing singular, because the engine had always been a bit faulty in that respect. This may be emphasized just here because of an important part it played later on that same day.

But they were soon on the road, and everything

seemed to be going merrily. Considerable territory can be covered in two hours, even over rough roads; had there been any real reason for arriving at their destination by noon perhaps they might have accomplished it. Since this was not the case, and it did not really matter if they reached the circus town at any time in the afternoon, Oscar took things easy.

Some time afterwards they heard strains of band music stealing faintly through the air, and knew that they must be approaching the town where the big Barley show was about to give an afternoon and evening performance.

They noticed that the adjacent country had been well covered by the advertising corps, for at every cross-roads, and upon each wooden bridge the gay posters now so familiar to all the boys met their eyes.

No doubt in the local paper there had been printed a more or less highly colored account of the thrilling accident that happened in Metuchen, when the "wonderful child rider, whose equal had never before been found," came near being dragged at the heels of her runaway "charger," that had in turn been stopped just in the nick of time by a brave boy who chanced to be close to the ringside.

"Like as not, Ballyhoo, you'll see your name in big black type in the heading of that same article," Jack had warned him; "because these old circus men never let an opportunity to advertise their show get past. Lots of people will come out just

to see the little maid who was so near death; and I'm thinking Major Barley may yet be offering you a princely sum just to show yourself nightly in the ring as the valiant rescuer."

But Ballyhoo only laughed, and said he wasn't going to make a fool of himself for the "filthy lucre." If he ever did go into the show business it would be as the "only living person who was a whole circus, band and all, unto himself, from the roaring lion, the screeching tiger-cat and the yawping hyena, down to the screaming elephant and the jabbering monkeys. He believed in doing things by "wholesale," he told Jack, with a superior air that belied the twinkle in his eye.

As they slowly entered the town, Oscar kept on the lookout for the best hotel. As it was already known to him by name he found little difficulty in reaching it. Mr. Carew, the ring-master, was just leaving, going to the circus to dress for the afternoon performance, no doubt. He stared hard at the boys as though he could hardly believe his eyes; which fact and his utter refusal to recognize their nods told Oscar and his mates that their suspicions must be well founded.

"He did that dirty business, all right," asserted Ballyhoo, indignantly; "and all this while he's been thinking we'd have to stay away from the circus because our car was out of commission. But we fooled Mr. Lionel Carew; and he's due to meet up with a few more shocks sooner or later, believe me."

"No boasting, Ballyhoo," warned Oscar.

"That type of man is hard to down, and we can count on having more jolts ourselves later on. But here's our old friend Martesa coming to say howd'ye to us; and it seems to me he looks more solemn than ever. I hope nothing has happened since last night to upset him."

The boys stood alongside the car waiting for Martesa to join them. And both Jack and Ballyhoo Jones could see that there was an added look of worry and deep anxiety on the sallow face of the old clown.

He shook hands with them warmly, and seemed more than pleased to know the lively trio had once again joined the show. When he heard how they had been detained for several hours through the dastardly work of some unknown miscreant Martesa expressed his displeasure.

"Who could have been so mean as to want to injure your property, and keep you from joining the show here?" he remarked, as though plainly puzzled.

"We've figured the thing all out," said Jack, soberly, "and come to the conclusion that it's because of our friendly interest in you and little Rosa, Martesa. Now, don't imagine for a minute that we regret it, because we expect to keep on knowing you more than ever after this. But we suspect that the ring-master, Mr. Carew, knows more about this slashing of our tires than any one else."

"But he came on the train with us, for I saw him," expostulated the clown, only to add: "Still,

he would find it an easy matter to bribe one of the followers of the circus. Some of our canvas-men are tough characters, you understand, and wouldn't mind earning a lump sum by doing a little job like that."

"Do you happen to know any one among the show followers whose initials would be B. M.?" demanded Oscar; "because we found this knife on the floor of the barn, and it was used to do the nasty job, for even now you can see signs of rubber on the big blade."

The clown seemed to think for a short time; then he replied to the question:

"Yes, there is one man I know whose name is Boyd Marsans. I think he is a Cuban, for I have heard him speak Spanish at times."

"What sort of a man is he, sir?" asked Oscar, nodding to his chums.

"As rough as they make circus canvasmen, and that's saying a good deal," came the answer. "I can only say I'd hate to meet Marsans on a dark night in a lonely place, and with any amount of money on my person."

"As like as not then he was the man who cut our tires, and managed to drop his knife," explained Oscar. "Perhaps he may be scared into making a clean confession that will implicate the ring-master, and get him fired from his job."

Mr. Simpson shook his head sadly.

"I'm afraid that would be too good a result to hope for," he told them. "You understand that Mr. Carew is a nephew of Major Barley. I've

known him for a good many years, and he isn't far from my own age, because you see, boys, I'm not as old as I look. My life has been a hard one, and it tells on a man heavily, this playing the fool. But the one satisfaction I have is that the children all love me wherever I go. And now I regret to tell you that I've received another blow."

"We're sorry to hear that, sir; what has happened since you left us?" Jack asked anxiously.

"I received a very strange letter from an unknown party, that has given me a staggering shock," explained the clown, sighing heavily as he spoke.

"Do you mean it was a threat of personal violence?" asked Oscar, frowning.

"Oh! no, not exactly that, son, but it seemed to portend some sort of peril hovering my child's head. You know, I suppose, how little Rosa was left in the Big Round-top twelve years ago, as an infant. There was only a scrawl on a piece of paper saying 'Call her Rosa.' My heart was almost broken at the time, because I had lost my wife some months before, she finding life with me unendurable, went off with some more handsome man, whose identity I never knew. So I took the child to my heart and adopted her, though there were never any legal papers made out. And now I may lose her, my little darling."

"Please tell us more about it," urged Oscar.

"Here is the letter I received this morning," explained the clown thrusting a hand in his pocket; and then hastily adding: "but I must have left it

in my other coat in the hotel room. But no matter. It was addressed to me, and stated that the writer who signed only the name of Sister Amelia, chanced to know positively who the parents of the little babe left in the tent of the Barley Circus twelve years ago were, and that shortly I would be placed in possession of the facts. There was also a half-veiled threat that the lawful guardians of little Rosa might desire to obtain possession of the child. It has given me a frightful chill. I have never stopped shivering ever since reading that letter. It will kill me if I have to give her up to others, she has become so essential to my happiness."

The boys, of course, tried in every way possible to cheer the old clown, but he shook his head sadly as he went on to say:

"I can hardly muster courage enough now to attempt my work this afternoon; for my smiles will cover an aching heart. How little do the good people know what lies under the surface, when they laugh at the witticisms and antics of Martesa? For some little time I have seemed to feel that this will be my last season of making fun for the young people of America, my best friends; and this blow seems only to confirm it."

Oscar, thereupon, said aside to Ballyhoo:

"I've been figuring to make that same thing come true, only in a different way from the one he means," and the Jones boy wondered what Oscar could possibly mean by his words, for thus far the other had not taken any one into his con-

fidence with regard to the letter sent to his guardian, and which was mostly about the clown and little Rosa.

"I don't suppose you told Rosa about the letter, sir?" ventured Jack.

"Oh! no, indeed!" he quickly replied. "The blow will fall soon enough without giving the poor child pain in advance. I shall not know an easy hour from now on."

"But would the law decide against the one who adopted a child that had been so cruelly deserted by its mother and father?" asked Ballyhoo, doubtfully.

"That's where the trouble comes in," he was told, sorrowfully, "for I never went through any formality when I took the babe to my heart, and said I would stand by it through thick and thin. My friends of the show all applauded me, and from that day to this they call little Rosa the Child of the Circus, but look upon her as belonging to me. But if a parent came upon the scene, and proved his or her legal rights, I fear they could separate us."

"Well, it won't be done without a stiff fight, then," Oscar assured him; "and I'll promise that everything money can do will be tried to beat them to it. So chirk up, Mr. Simpson; we're going to stand by you right along."

He could not say another word, but went around shaking their hands, with his grateful soul shining in his eyes. Then he hurried off, heading for the place where the circus was holding forth.

"Isn't it too bad," said Ballyhoo, looking after the old clown, and shaking his head sadly, "that this thing has to strike the poor old fellow. Just as if he didn't have enough to bother about before, with Carew acting as hateful as he does."

"Well, hold your horses," advised Oscar. "They say it's always darkest just before dawn, and perhaps that may hold good in Mr. Simpson's case, too. I'm rather expecting a letter myself soon, and it isn't going to threaten to separate me from my chums, either."

Ballyhoo by now had his curiosity fully aroused.

"Tell us what you're up to, won't you, Oscar?" he begged; but the other only laughed, and shook his head in the negative, saying:

"Just wait a bit longer, and I may have something nice to tell you; but I wouldn't like to arouse your hopes until I know how the land lies. So please don't ask me again, boys. I want to spring a little surprise on some of my friends, that's the extent of it."

With that he told them to pass into the hotel while he put his car in the garage, for this up-to-date caravansary chanced to have modern conveniences. Of course, the camera and outfit, as well as their grips, had to be carried in, and the two boys concluded to undertake the task, though Oscar begged them to leave something for him after he came back from the garage.

A hired man coming along just then was commandeered, and loaded down with the impedimenta, which in good time was transported to

their room; for they were fortunate enough to get a large chamber with two beds, as before.

As they had already dined on the road, the boys were not at all concerned with regard to taking on "supplies," as Ballyhoo Jones called it. When evening came along they expected to have supper there, along with many of the show people.

Oscar and Jack had kept a faithful list of all that had been accomplished with regard to taking the pictures. They knew just what was lacking, and now laid their plans accordingly so as to fill in the gaps, and make the film circus complete.

As before they felt that they could get better light when the interior of the Big Round-top was illuminated with the full stock of lamps; accordingly, Jack meant to snap off only an occasional scene during the afternoon. These would be in the main of the crowd thronging into the tent; or taking in some of the more ambitious side-shows, where the Snake Queen handled her awful pets, having a glistening belt, a necklace of vipers, and a huge anaconda coiled about her; the Head Hunters from the Moro Islands in the Philippines exhibited their singular dance as an invitation to curious country people to enter and see a native village in all its queer toggery; the Wild Man from Borneo placed himself on exhibition, and at intervals uttered his blood-chilling cries; and various other strange sights tempted the visitors to part with their hard-earned dimes and quarters.

All these things are ever associated with the circus in the memory of men who can look back

forty years, and see how as lads they grew wild with excitement at the bare prospect of standing around by the hour and gaping at these free sights. And Jack wisely knew that no living picture series of a modern circus would ever be complete without these side-show accompaniments.

As always the town was given over to a holiday. All thought of shopping left womens' heads; men locked their stores at noon, and called it a half day; while farmers put the horses into the light wagon shafts and fetched almost their entire households in for the grand treat, with pink lemonade and peanuts galore as an added attraction.

And as the afternoon waned Jack was conscious of having added a number of very clever pictures to his last roll of exposed film. He exercised his judgment in picking out just such scenes as appealed most to his temperament as a genuine boy, and which he was certain would evoke the most applause later on when exhibited on the screen.

So the day came to a close, and once more the three lads found themselves wending their way toward the hotel, satisfied with all they had done, and feeling almost positive that another good twenty-four hours would give them all they wanted in the way of thrillers.

CHAPTER XIV

UNDER THE BAN OF THE RING-MASTER

"You look tired, Ballyhoo," remarked Jack, as they rested for a brief time on the usual porch of the town hotel, before going to their room to wash up for supper.

"Well, I am knocked up a little," admitted the other, with a faint smile, "but I reckon I'll be feeling O. K. after we've had some grub. All the same I'm bothered."

"What about?" demanded Jack.

"Why, here's Oscar and you as good as saying that our business will be finished in another day or two at the most, if we have decent luck," complained Ballyhoo.

"But what is there to worry you about that, when success ought to make every one of us jubilant?" asked the "camera man," as Jack often called himself.

"Oh! shucks! Jack, don't you see that if our job is completed we'll really have no genuine excuse for hanging around the old circus any longer. And say, I'm so much interested in things by this time I'd sure hate to break away. Besides, seems to

me we fixed it up between us that we'd stand by Mr. Simpson, for he's getting into a whole peck of trouble."

"Don't leave out the little girl when you're about it, Ballyhoo," suggested Oscar, wickedly, though the one he addressed shut his jaws firmly together, and absolutely refused to show signs of confusion.

"I am thinking about poor little Rosa, who never had a chance to see good times in all her life," Ballyhoo admitted, frankly. "That ring-master with his sneer, and his cruel-looking eyes, means to knock Martesa out of his job here sooner or later, you mark me if he doesn't. Now, what are we going to do about it, fellows? Oscar, don't tell me that you're planning to skip out just as soon as the last picture is filmed."

"Make your mind easy on that score, Ballyhoo," said Oscar, positively; "no one ever accused me of going back on my word, or my friends; and you heard me promise, both of you, that I meant to back the old clown up to the limit. Wait a minute, for here comes the landlord, I expect, though we haven't met him before."

A stout man approached them. It was easy to guess that he was the manager of the Berkley Arms, as the town hotel was called. Business was good just then, since he had his caravansary crowded to the limit; hence he was smiling affably.

"One of you young gents named Oscar Farrar?" he asked as he came up; "because here's a letter that's been waiting for you."

Immediately, Oscar half sprung from his chair, he was that excited.

"Thank you, landlord, it belongs to me," he said, taking the letter, upon which the proprietor retired discreetly.

Both Jack and Ballyhoo watched their chum as he hastily opened the envelope. And when they noticed how his hands actually trembled they exchanged significant nods and looks. Still neither of them could as much as guess who Oscar's correspondent could be. The writing looked sprawling, and not at all girlish, so they had to conclude that Oscar's letter must be a business communication, and not a *billet doux* from some girl friend whom he usually took to barn dances, singing school, and like entertainments along through the season in the home town.

"Well, are you meaning to take us into your confidence or not, Oscar?" finally demanded Jack, as he saw that the other was actually reading the letter for a second time.

"I guess the time has come for me to let you in," began Oscar, with a joyous ring to his voice. "I thought it best not to say a word about what I'd done until I could make sure that my guardian wouldn't throw obstacles in the way; but I ought to have known the dear old chap better than to think there was any chance of that."

"Is the letter from Doctor Clements, then?" asked Jack.

"Just what it is," came the answer. "Now listen, and I'll explain it all to you. At the time

we found ourselves so much interested in Martesa and his pretty little ward, Rosa, and learned how he hoped some day to save enough money to retire from the ring and live the simple life in the country, among the chickens and ducks and all that sort of thing, why I happened to remember about that fine farm of mine not more than ten miles away from Melancton. You must know that it's fixed so I can't dispose of it for ten years more, and there never was a prettier spot that it covers, with its comfortable farm-house, barns, hen-houses, running brook, fruit orchards and everything that a person who loved the quiet of the country would want. Well, it occurred to me that since our last tenant went West to join his son my lovely little twenty-acre farm had been in the charge of a caretaker, and that Doctor Clements wasn't exactly satisfied with the way things were being run. So I wrote him all about Mr. Simpson and little Rosa, and told him I wanted to turn the farm over to them on favorable terms, for it wouldn't matter to me if I never realized one red cent out of the transaction."

"Oh! good for you, Oscar!" cried Ballyhoo, with his eyes as round as old fashioned pennies; "I might have just known you'd think up some glorious way to help these good friends of ours over their troubles. And now what did your guardian say in his letter?"

"I'd ask you to read it, boys," said Oscar, "but the fact of the matter is Doctor Clements writes such a terrible hand than even old Horace

Greeley wouldn't have anything on him; and they used to say *he* couldn't make out his own stuff after the writing got cold. But I'm used to deciphering the scrawls, and I'll give you the gist of what he writes here."

"Then pitch in, for goodness' sake, Oscar," pleaded Ballyhoo, impatiently.

"He says that at first he feared I might have been imposed on by some kind of schemer, but when he got to reading my long and interesting letter over again, and remembered that I was no simpleton, he began to weigh things at their true value. And in the end he congratulated me for being so solicitous about those who were in distress; also agreeing to back me up in all that I was figuring on doing. So that's settled!"

"It will give old Martesa the best surprise he's had for a long time, I warrant you," declared Jack, who seemed heartily in sympathy with what his chum had proposed. "Then after this season is over, and the cold, bleak Fall comes along, instead of his having to seek obscure quarters in some city or town to pass the Winter in, he'll have a well-stocked farm to handle, and find all the peace and quiet he's been longing for so long."

"Remember, for the present not a word of this to anybody," warned Oscar, as they prepared to start up the stairs to their room, carrying the motion picture photographic outfit along with them, for it had to be watched jealously.

Among themselves, of course, the boys talked more or less concerning the new development that

had come to pass, and the more they grasped its import the better all of them were pleased.

It was at supper that they next saw the old clown and little Rosa. The girl nodded to them across the long table and her bright eyes showed how pleased she was to see these new friends again. Ballyhoo had the audacity to tell himself that most of her shy glances were especially meant for him; but then that was only to be expected, since his had been the hand to stay the dash of the alarmed circus horse at the time the little girl was dragging at the animal's heels; and really she might have been much more seriously injured but for his prompt action.

Mr. Carew was evidently in unusually bad temper. His face was flushed, and his whole manner arrogant. Somehow his mood seemed to depress the spirits of the entire party. He had been drinking heavily, and was in a quarrelsome mood, which the circus company knew only too well, and also feared. They almost talked in whispers at times, and there was lacking the jovial conversation that as a rule enlivened the meals they ate in common.

All was not going well with the Barley Circus, and some even believed there was bound to be a smash before long; for the manager and ringmaster was running things almost as he pleased, and poor Major Barley seemed to have lost his grip.

Of course, this did not concern the boys to any great extent, since they had no interest in the con-

cern beyond finishing their contract with the owner, and completing the series of film pictures. After knowing how splendidly Oscar had arranged to provide for the pair in whose fortunes they were concerned, Ballyhoo Jones and Jack could observe these signs of coming trouble with indifference, though they did feel a little sorry for Major Barley.

All of them were really glad when that uncomfortable meal was over. In fact, the ring-master stayed to the last, like a ghost at the feast, and the boys believed his intention was to prevent any general conversation in connection with the way he was taking the reins in his hands and running things into the ground.

Once outside and the boys waited for Martesa and his pretty ward to appear. Ballyhoo Jones immediately monopolized the attention of little Rosa, while the other two boys turned to the clown.

To their surprise Mr. Simpson seemed more cheerful, as though he had succeeded in getting one load at least off his mind.

"Well, it seems that after all my prediction is going to come true, boys, and that my season will be considerably shorter than I planned," he told them first of all.

"Why, what's happened now?" asked Jack, taken aback.

"I'm going to leave the show at the end of this week. Privately, Major Barley has promised to pay me my full salary for the balance of the sea-

son; but it winds up the public career of Martesa. The children next year will have to find another clown to amuse them."

"Was Mr. Carew the cause of it all?" continued Jack, indignantly.

"Yes. He is unusually ugly to-day, and somehow seems to have a special spite toward me. He forced a quarrel on me, and then went to Major Barley demanding my immediate discharge."

"But surely your long service ought to count for something," said Jack; "and as a popular drawing card your place will be hard to fill."

"Well, I used to think that way once myself, but now I know better. No man is indispensable, save perhaps efficient ring-masters and managers. There are plenty of good clowns to be had for the price. Major Barley tried to dissuade him, but the longer they talked the more bitter Carew became, at last threatening to desert the show himself unless I was sent packing. Finally, the major had to agree that I was to leave at the end of this week, never to come back again. My contract runs to the end of the season, but if he had wanted to be mean about it he could have easily found a loophole, and not paid me the balance of my money. But Major Barley isn't that kind of a man. So I'm going away, and will soon be forgotten."

"But how about little Rosa; will she still stay with the show?" asked Jack.

"She goes when I do, for our contracts were made out together," came the stern reply.

CHAPTER XV

THE CLOWN HEARS THE NEWS

OSCAR had heard all this with conflicting emotions. He realized that the climax of the old clown's troubles had arrived much more swiftly than any of them had imagined would be the case, and he decided that it would be really cruel longer to withhold the reassuring news that had just come to him through the mails.

"After all, Mr. Simpson," Oscar said, "we are none of us very much surprised, because from what we've heard we expected it would come to this. In fact, I made up my mind several days ago to carry out a little scheme I had in mind. The answer has just reached me in this letter from my guardian, Doctor Clements, as fine a man as you could find anywhere, and one you'll be glad to know."

Then, as briefly as possible, Oscar told how he had that splendid little farm with all the comforts those who live in the country could ever expect to find; and how he purposed giving it in charge of Martesa on as long a lease as he wished, and at a nominal rent that could be easily made off the hay crop alone.

It was worth while, Jack thought, to see the look of wonder and supreme joy that gradually crept over the wrinkled face of the clown as he grasped the full extent of the kindness displayed by these new friends.

"You have made me very happy, my boy!" Martesa exclaimed, as he wrung Oscar's hand warmly; "not so much on account of offering me your farm, for I suppose I could have found one somewhere in a pinch; but because of the warm, generous spirit you show toward a poor old fellow like me."

"But you'll accept the offer, won't you, sir?" demanded Oscar, "for unless you do you'll make us all feel badly. We want you and little Rosa to be living near our home town, where we can see a lot of you in times to come. Why, I've been picturing how the whole three of us will run out weekends and stay over with you to help in the harvest field, or pick apples in the Fall season. It would break up all my plans if you went back on us, Mr. Simpson."

Jack added his entreaties to those of his chum.

"We certainly couldn't hear of you declining, sir," he said, stoutly. "If you feel that you are under any obligation to us for the little we've been able to do so far, now's your chance to wipe out the debt by accepting, and making us happy. And Ballyhoo Jones is a unit with both of us in saying that, too."

"Why, I'd be a fool to let such a wonderful chance get past me!" declared the other, his eyes

sparkling with delight. "Here I was just bemoaning the fact that the blow I've been expecting and dreading for a long time had fallen, when all the while you loyal lads have been conspiring to give me the most wonderful surprise of my whole life. Of course, I'm going to accept; and the future already begins to look golden to me."

"Then we'll consider that part of it settled, shall we, Mr. Simpson?" asked Oscar.

"Since you wish it I will give you my promise; and no words of mine could ever tell what I am feeling deep down in my heart just now," said Martesa. "To think that the man whose whole life has been spent in giving young people amusement should finally owe his entire happiness to three fine boys like you."

"It's what my father would call poetic justice, sir," laughed Jack. "I can hear him saying right now, 'he who lives by the sword will die by the sword,' and as you've been always making others happy, and children for the most part at that, why it's only right the 'bread you've cast upon the waters should return to you' in the end."

"Well," chuckled Oscar, amused by this flight, "you're certainly chock full of quotations to-day, Jack, that's sure."

"Since we've made such splendid progress with our work so far," continued Jack, "I reckon we can skip out at the same time Mr. Simpson does, and head for Melancton again, eh, Oscar?"

"That's right," came the quick reply, as though Oscar, with his customary speed, had already fig-

wred it out, "and as there'll be plenty of room aboard the *Ark*, I'm going to ask Mr. Simpson right here and now to go along with us."

"Great!" exclaimed Jack, before the clown could answer one way or the other, for such a succession of kind acts seemed to be taking away his breath, "and we can take it as easy as we please about getting back home. We expected to be away for two weeks, you know, and here one hasn't wholly gone. Well, I'm glad that's settled. And Ballyhoo Jones will be tickled half to death, too, I wager."

"It's time I started for the circus grounds," the clown suggested just then, as though suddenly arousing from a delightful dream. Truth to tell, he could hardly be blamed for half suspecting that he must be dreaming, since it must have been hard for him to realize that such a happy termination to his troubles had come to pass.

He bade Oscar and Jack good-bye. They noticed that again a shadow had fallen upon his face, as though some unpleasant thought may have suddenly arisen to dispel in a measure his recent great joy. Going to where Ballyhoo Jones and little Rosa were chatting and laughing at a great rate, the clown shook hands with the boy, and then taking the girl with him, hurried away.

Rosa was evidently bewildered by his manner, and did not know what to make of it, for Oscar could see how she looked shyly up at her companion's face several times as though trying to fathom the truth. Of course, Martesa would

quickly pass the wonderful news on to her, understanding how rejoiced the girl would be to know that the future now looked so rosy for them.

Ballyhoo now came hastening over to where his two chums stood, and the eager look on his round face told that his curiosity had been somehow excited.

"I say, Oscar," was the way in which he burst forth immediately he joined them there, "did you tell Mr. Simpson about that jolly little model farm of yours; that had such fine fruit orchards, and with the comfy house just yearning for him and little Rosa to come and take possession for keeps?"—

"You've guessed it, Ballyhoo, go up head," said Jack; "for that's just what we did do, while you were talking soft stuff to little Rosa."

"Oh! come, don't accuse me of being a softy, Jack," remonstrated the other, with a show of real or pretended indignation; "she was telling me about a lot of funny things she'd known to happen in the ring, and they'd make anybody yell. But how did he take it, and will he accept?"

Ballyhoo had such an imploring expression on his freckled face that Jack could not find the heart to tantalize him any longer.

"Yes, he's given Oscar his solemn affidavit that he'll accept, and occupy that bully farm-house. You see, he's had a row with Carew, just as we expected would happen, and the manager and ring-master put it up to Major Barley that either Martesa had to quit this Saturday night, or he would.

So our friend is going, and Oscar made him promise to join us with Rosa in the car, for we'll be heading toward home then."

"Oh! I'm ever so glad it's all fixed," said Ballyhoo, drawing a long breath of relief. "I was hoping you might be explaining the thing to him, and wondering how he'd take to it. Now there's no reason for any of us worrying, is there?"

"Things do begin to look settled," admitted Jack. "I hardly think that joy-killer, Mr. Carew, will try to do anything more to hurt Martesa. Somehow, he's been taking a greater dislike toward the clown every week, and what the reason is no one can guess."

"I suppose Mr. Simpson was staggered when he heard about the card Oscar was hiding up his sleeve?" remarked Ballyhoo; "and I can imagine how glad he must have been to know he'd see us often in the future, because he seems to have taken a great fancy to you two fellows."

"Oh! what's the use of being so modest, Ballyhoo, when you know that both of them think the world of you in the bargain," laughed Jack; "but he did seem happy, and told us the future was beginning to look as lovely as a summer sunset to him, if you'll forgive the figure of speech. Still, just as he said good-bye to us, I couldn't help but notice that Martesa's face had clouded up, didn't you, Oscar?"

"Yes, and from that I knew he had suddenly remembered something that began to sap his happiness again," said the other, slowly.

"I believe I can give a guess as to what it was," Jack announced.

"That strange letter he had received from some unknown person," continued Oscar, "stating that the writer knew to a certainty who the parents of little Rosa were, and that shortly Martesa might expect to be called upon by the one who sent the letter, to show the necessary proofs. You see, the one dread he has now is that the legitimate guardians of the girl, one or both of her parents, may come to claim her, and take his little ward away from him."

"He said the letter was signed by some one who gave the name of Sister Amelia, didn't he?" ventured Jack. "That sounds as though it might be a nun, or a Sister of Charity. But let's hope that something can be done to keep them from separating Martesa and his little ward."

"Once we get them to the farm," asserted Oscar, finally, "I'll employ the best lawyer going to fight the case, and prevent any one taking little Rosa from the man who's stood between her and the cold world all these long years. It'd be a shame if poor Martesa lost the only comfort left to him, now that he's quit the ring for good."

"More power to your elbow, Oscar!" exclaimed Ballyhoo Jones; "and if you need any help, remember that my family has got some clever lawyers in it. That goes!"

CHAPTER XVI

AN UNEXPECTED EVENT

LATER on the boys made their way to the circus grounds where the afternoon performance was under way. Of course, they took along with them the camera and other necessary things, for Jack had several pictures in mind which he hoped to capture.

That night he hoped to secure the thrilling episode of Senor Hernandez, the daring animal trainer, in his wonderful act; and then, too, there was still another "classic," as the enthusiastic photographer called it, where Shamus O'Brien, the "elephant king," put his clumsy charges through a most remarkable series of tricks calculated to amuse untold millions when shown on the screen, from one end of the country to the other.

"Now's our chance to try that little trick on the Cuban, Marsters," suggested Jack, after he had finished his work for the afternoon, though the show was not yet out. "You know we figured how we might get him to commit himself, and acknowledge that the knife was his. Shall we make a try at it, Oscar?"

"Just as you say," the other replied. "Here,

keep the thing, Jack, and when the time is ripe I'll ask you to lend it to me for a minute. Then watch his face, and see if it shows anything like recognition. Taken by surprise, he's apt to give himself away."

This little plan was carried out successfully. Marsters, taken by surprise, confessed that the knife was his. When told where it had been found he admitted that the ring-master had employed him to play that scurvy trick, under the impression that he could injure the boys and cause them to leave the circus.

After promising the alarmed Marsters that he would not be prosecuted, the boys tried to get a comprehensive grasp upon the situation.

"Well, now that we've found out who was back of that dirty business," Ballyhoo Jones was saying, as with his chums he started for the rear of the Big Round-top, for Jack had arranged to secure a picture of the company at their supper later on, "what are we going to do about it?"

"Nothing," Oscar told him, immediately. "Just as I said to Marsters, our curiosity is satisfied, and we'll let the matter drop."

"Then like as not," urged the other, who did not enjoy giving up when his bump of curiosity was excited, "we'll never really know just why Carew hates us as he does, so that he'd go to all the trouble and expense of hiring that Cuban keeper to do what he did."

"We can give a pretty good guess," Oscar informed him, "and, of course, it takes in Mar-

Martesa and little Rosa. Carew saw that we were getting more and more friendly with these two, and somehow it made him dislike us. I can think of no other explanation, because none of us has ever given him any reason to hate us. We came under his condemnation because we were friends of theirs. And that, of course, brings up the mystery Martesa himself couldn't solve—why does Mr. Carew feel that way toward the clown and his pretty little ward?"

"I'll tell you what I think," snapped Ballyhoo, somewhat to the surprise of his chums, for they were not accustomed to having him spring ideas on them in that abrupt fashion. "I believe at some time or other this Carew has injured Mr. Simpson and the memory of it keeps him feeling ugly toward the clown."

"But surely Martesa would know of it, you'd think?" interposed Jack.

Oscar, on the other hand, seemed ready to agree with Ballyhoo Jones.

"It might be," he went on to say, slowly and thoughtfully, "that Martesa himself doesn't know that Mr. Carew ever injured him."

Just then the show ended for the afternoon, though the band continued to play lively patriotic airs as the throng pushed out of the big tent. Many would have liked to linger and watch the animals, but they were not allowed to pass through the menagerie section.

Feeding the inmates of the numerous cages would be the next thing on the programme, and

arrangements had already been made whereby Jack could secure enough light to help him get effective pictures.

After that came the supper of the circus people, and this was conducted in as natural a fashion as possible. Those minor performers knew how to carry out their parts to perfection; and Oscar, as well as Ballyhoo Jones, declared that Jack had obtained a splendid addition to his film series.

Then they went back to the hotel. Martesa and little Rosa had been prominent features of the supper scene, but they vanished before the boys could get to speak to them, possibly going to their section in the old sleeping car, for some purpose.

"But we'll make sure to see them again to-night," ventured Ballyhoo, eagerly; "and as this is Friday, I hope we can get them to travel with us to the next stop. It will be their last jump, you know, boys. Oscar, how about that?"

"I'll put it up to Mr. Simpson," he was told without any hesitation; "but I feel pretty confident that he'll accept for himself and Rosa. Perhaps by now Martesa may be feeling a little nervous about the child, and wondering whether this strange dislike on the part of Mr. Carew would go so far as to tempt him to try to injure Rosa in some way. Yes, we must make him agree to keep in our company."

Once again they were back on the ground, to watch the customary sights that were always to be seen, as the crowds of people commenced to

gather. Scores of boys hung around, "pop-eyed," as Ballyhoo Jones called it, and only hoping and praying there might come up a chance whereby they could successfully elude the vigilance of the attendants, and crawl under the canvas side of the big tent, thus gaining a free admission to the wonderful show. Several husky fellows did actually manage to get in by volunteering to carry water for the elephant herd under the watchful eye of a keeper; and they were envied by their less fortunate cronies, "left mourning without the walls of Paradise."

It was about this time, as the three chums were sitting there resting on some old boxes that had been heaped up by the side-show fakirs that Jack suddenly observed:

"There's Major Barley, and as sure as anything he's heading this way. I guess he must have glimpsed us, and wants to find out how near we've gotten through."

"It may be some other reason in the bargain that makes him come this way," Oscar proceeded to say, shrewdly; "because I wouldn't be surprised now if the old showman is at heart ashamed of having given in to Mr. Carew, his nephew, and wants to explain it to us, knowing we are taking a great interest in Martesa and Rosa."

"How are you getting along with the pictures, boys?" he asked.

Jack proceeded to assure him that he had almost completed his task, and was, on the whole, well satisfied with what he had accomplished.

"I suppose you have heard that we are going to lose our old friend, Martesa, and little Rosa, after to-morrow?" continued the showman, looking confused, as though he did not altogether like the situation after he had, as Ballyhoo had once said, "put his foot in it."

"Yes, we have heard about it," said Oscar.

"I never felt anything worse in my whole experience as a circus proprietor," declared Major Barley, dejectedly; "for I've really cared considerably for Martesa, and the girl; but I had to choose, and I couldn't get another manager and efficient ring-master in the middle of the season, at any price. It was much against my will that I decided to let them go; and, privately, I arranged to pay them their full salary for the balance of the season."

"Which was mighty good of you, sir," Oscar told him, sincerely glad to hear the veteran showman talk in the way he did. "Martesa explained to us the difficulty you would be put in if your manager left you in the lurch. Then again I believe he has an interest in the show, and is your nephew besides?"

"Both statements are true, son," the other continued, still looking distressed. "I was placed between two horns of a dilemma, and had to choose the softest place to fall on. You see, considerable of my success of recent years has resulted from efficient management on the part of Mr. Carew."

"Now, since you think so highly of Mr. Simpson and little Rosa, sir," continued Oscar, "I've a

mind to tell you in advance what sort of an arrangement we've made up between us."

So he explained how for years the clown had been trying to save enough out of his salary to buy a farm, to which he meant to retire, and enjoy life; and how the chance had come for Oscar to offer him a home that would fill all his anticipations.

"Good for you, son!" Major Barley exclaimed, as he seized upon the boy's hand, and wrung it; "I am delighted to hear that. It relieves my mind more than I can tell you, for I have been wondering what would become of Martesa."

There could be no doubt about his feeling pleased. Oscar, however, thought it just as well to ask the old showman not to give the secret away until after they had severed their connection with the company.

"Please don't mention it to a living soul until we've departed for our home town. It might get to the ears of Mr. Carew, and cause poor Martesa trouble in some way."

"I give you my word that I'll keep it a dead secret until you've gone," the old showman assured Oscar; "but then I want the privilege of telling it broadcast, for nearly every one in the caravan cares a heap for Martesa and little Rosa, while, truth to tell, they detest and fear my efficient nephew."

"If you don't mind telling me, sir," remarked Oscar, seemingly only influenced by a sense of curiosity, "about how long ago was it that this acci-

dent happened to Lionel Carew, who at the time you say was a noted bareback rider."

"Let me see," returned the old showman, reflectively, as he screwed up his heavy white eyebrows, "something like ten or eleven years ago at least. Yes, he was with the Sellers for three years, and then managed the big Horner Brothers' Show for something like three more, when I got him to join me. But I'm afraid he's not going to hold the pace many years longer, because—well, of course, you know he's taken more to drinking latterly than ever before. That ruins every man connected with a circus who allows his weakness to master him."

"Thank you, sir," said Oscar, without explaining just why he wished to secure that information connected with Mr. Carew.

So Major Barley left them. He had come to like the three chums exceedingly during their mutual intercourse. They impressed him as a set of bold and capable young fellows, who were bound to make a sterling success of anything which they undertook; and being a man of the world, who had himself seen considerable of excitement and adventure in his own checkered career, the show owner could appreciate these good qualities in the rising generation.

When Oscar asked Martesa to form a part of their circle, and join them in the ride to the next town he willingly agreed.

"You've gone and bound us to you with such strong ties, boys," he told them, in a voice that

quivered a little with emotion, "that I'll have to give up. Do with us as you will from now on; we are like so much putty in your hands."

It was accordingly arranged that the pair should wait after their work for the evening's entertainment was through, and join the three motion picture comrades when they were ready to start in the big car.

People were arriving now, although few had as yet gone. The boys were loitering, since they only had these two last acts to capture when their big task would have been brought to a successful completion.

Already had Jack sent away by express a number of films to be developed by the most successful firm doing that sort of business. Oscar, on his part, had insured them at a very high figure, in order to compel the carrying company to take particular pains in keeping them from being injured.

"We might as well go inside, and secure our places before the crowd flocks in," Jack was saying, as he saw several large squads of people leaving the street car not far from the big vacant lot on which the tents had been raised, and which was now the centre attraction of the town.

"And I hope," Ballyhoo Jones ventured to say, "that you'll not be wanting me to help out, because, you see, I promised I'd stay close to the ringside. Rosa told he she'd feel a whole lot *safer* if I was handy when she rode her horse around the arena, and jumped through all those

paper-covered hoops; as well as turned those somersaults; for you must know she's concluded to retain that last as a part of her act after this."

The others laughed at Ballyhoo, but Jack, of course, told him to go ahead.

"It's the last evening but one, thank goodness," said Ballyhoo, with a sigh, "when she'll be risking her pretty little neck by those contortions. I don't mind being a whole circus myself, band-wagon, menagerie and all, but say, I do hate to see her turning over in the air, and lighting on the back of that galloping horse. But listen to all that shouting inside the tent there; something has happened; what is it they're calling, can you make out?"

A man came dashing out of the menagerie tent just then. He looked half scared to death, and his face was marked by blood. At the top of his voice he shouted:

"Run for your lives, everybody; the lions are loose! Run! run!"

And the three boys remembered that just a minute before Martesa and little Rosa had entered that same tent, from which they could have hardly passed on their way to the dressing-rooms.

CHAPTER XVII

THE LIONS AT LARGE AND THE PANIC

"OH! Martesa—Rosa, both in there!" shrilled Ballyhoo, at the top of his voice, and when he wanted to make himself heard the Jones boy could almost eclipse the siren of the circus calliope in volume of piercing sound.

Both he and Oscar made a rush forward. Jack also started impulsively, but immediately remembering that duty chained him fast to his camera and precious belongings, he turned back, not without a feeling of intense regret.

Before he had taken three strides, Oscar realized that it was the utmost folly to think of trying to butt in through the single entrance and exit of the menagerie tent. Already that narrow space was jammed with the figures of the nearly frantic people who had been watching the animals at the time this accident occurred. Even a giant would have found it utterly impossible to make headway against such concentrated force. They fought furiously to escape, and the jam was frightful, indeed, with everybody screaming and crying and saying all manner of things because they could hardly move.

Just then something struck the side of the tent

a furious blow. Oscar saw a pair of feet appear in view after which a figure of a boy came pushing underneath the canvas wall. Scrambling to his knees, and then gaining his feet, the lad rushed off, looking as though he had been frightened half out of his wits. He had seen quite enough of circus to satisfy *him*, for one day at least.

But the incident gave Oscar an idea. If the boy could pass out in that fashion there was no reason why he and Ballyhoo should not get in through the same means.

"Come on!" he whooped, making a dive for the spot, since it was known that the canvas was loose enough after the other boy had passed under to afford them passage.

They made a simultaneous dive for the ground, and started to push under. There need be no fear of a watchful attendant, armed with a cane or whip, for just then lurkers were not desirous of breaking *into* the menagerie tent, however they may have yearned to do the same five minutes previously.

Meanwhile, the volume of sound that welled up from the interior of the tent almost baffled description. It seemed as though every species of animal known to a modern zoological garden must be endeavoring to outdo one another in a vocal chorus. Elephants trumpeted wildly, dogs barked, horses neighed in fright, wolves, tigers, hyenas, bears and every other species of beast tried the best they knew how to increase the mad racket that reigned.

Above all else there came the roaring of the lions at intervals. Oscar could not help feeling a cold chill pass over him at the thought of those enormous beasts being at liberty to leap from one side of the great tent to another, seeking some way to gain the open air. Why, it seemed as though the very atmosphere fairly pulsated when those deep bass roars rung out; and on every occasion the shrieks of women and the shouts of men followed, as in imagination they felt the hot breath of the forest kings fanning their cheeks while they struggled to escape.

No sooner were the two camera boys well inside the tent than they began to see what was going on there, and it was, indeed, a pandemonium that greeted their vision.

The elephants with upraised trunks were rearing and plunging, though fortunately chained fast to stakes that defied all their efforts to get free. Every inmate of an animal cage was bounding back and forth, the incarnation of fury and rage, at the same time helping to make the noise more terrible.

But the eyes of the boys sought two spots in particular where the tawny-skinned lions could be seen. They were both at large in the tent. Several attendants armed with whips or spears or any sort of weapon they could hurriedly snatch up had managed to corner one of the great beasts; and there was now going on an exchange of blows between them. The beast would crouch, and strike furiously at his tormentors, at times half launch-

ing his agile body forward, when the ranks of the circus men would fall hastily back a few paces.

They were evidently waiting for the coming of Senor Hernandez, the trainer, who must have been dressing at the time in a rear tent, and could not reach the spot on the spur of the moment.

But that was only one of the beasts—the other gripped the attention of Oscar and Ballyhoo Jones almost immediately, and what they saw filled the boys with a sense of abject horror.

“Look! Oscar, he’s killed poor Martesa!” almost shrieked Ballyhoo, as he pointed a quivering finger toward the spot where they could see the clown, still dressed in his street clothes, lying on his face, and motionless.

That was not the worst of it, though, as Oscar had already discovered. Just as he looked he saw the big lion come to a stop in front of some heavy boxes, and insert one of his paws between the two sides of the pile. Apparently, he was trying to reach some object that had taken refuge in the cavity.

Oscar knew very well what it undoubtedly meant. The presence of poor Martesa lying there was sufficient evidence to satisfy him. Little Rosa was in that cavity, though they could not see her. Perhaps the clown had forced the child to crawl into the hole when he saw the lions loose; but before he could follow suit he had been knocked down, and possibly mauled by one of the flying beasts.

Although these great animals were supposed to be partly tamed, and amenable to discipline at the hands of their trainer, once they found themselves free apparently their natures responded to the old savage instincts, and for the time being they were just as dangerous as when in their native African jungles.

If the pile of boxes would only hold out long enough against the force being applied by the lion in endeavoring to get at little Rosa, so as to let the trainer come to the rescue, all might yet be well. Oscar, his heart thumping almost like the tattoo of an electric rivetting machine, fastened his eyes on the pile, and shivered when he saw that it was shaking.

Just then he heard new shouts from the group of attendants engaged in holding the second lion in subjection, and casting a quick glance in that quarter, Oscar saw the flash of spangles, and caught a glimpse of tights. Then the wonderful Senor Hernandez had managed to reach the scene of turmoil, and his knowledge of wild animal characteristics would presently enable them to force the defiant beast back to slink into its cage.

But this could not be managed in a hurry, for the animal had tasted the fierce joy of freedom, and would not give up in a hurry. Seconds, even minutes must elapse and in the meantime what of little Rosa, and of poor Martesa, who lay there as though the blow received from the paw of the brute had knocked him out?

All this while the clamor had not abated a par-

ticle. The people who could not push their way through the narrow exit fully believed that they would be the next victims of the infuriated beasts, and their cries were something heart-rending. Two women had already fainted, and others were threatening to do the same, as they beat upon the backs of those who blocked their passage, forming a wedge that seemed to grow tighter the more they fought and struggled.

One man was standing by himself and shouting as he gesticulated wildly. Oscar believed he might be trying to tell the fighting throng that they could easily get out of the tent by crawling under the side; but his voice was evidently lost in the hurricane of sound that welled up. If he had possessed a megaphone possibly he might have made himself understood.

Oscar began to be afraid that if they had to wait for the first lion to be caged it might be too late to save the girl who crouched there between those piled-up boxes.

The beast had leaped back, and made several starts as though about to leave; but some savage instinct always drew him once more to where he knew a human form was almost within reach of his extended claws.

The boxes were really tottering. It would not take much more of an effort on the part of the striving beast to cause the pile to collapse, when, of course, poor little Rosa would be exposed to the lion's terrible fury.

It was abject folly to think of attacking such

a beast without the slightest weapon, and no one knew this better than Oscar Farrar. He had, however, seen something that inspired him with a sudden hope, if only the two of them could manage to reach the spot where that small furnace with its charcoal fire stood, without the lion attacking them.

Oscar remembered what that same brazier was for. It always contained a living fire of red coals, and in this several long iron bars were kept at white heat, so that in case the inmates of any of the animal cages started fighting among themselves one of the attendants could hastily snatch up a bar and thrust its heated end between the scrambling beasts. That was a sovereign remedy for all hostilities.

So even as he advanced, Oscar was trying to call the attention of his chum to the little charcoal furnace on the ground just to one side of the spot where the tragic scene was being enacted.

Although the noise had not abated a particle, and hearing was next to impossible, still in some manner Ballyhoo understood what sort of desperate plan his comrade had conceived.

With their hearts seemingly in their mouths, such was the fear of being intercepted in their advance, the two boys crept forward, and gradually approached the spot where the friendly little charcoal furnace stood.

CHAPTER XVIII

COWED WITH A HISSING HOT IRON

PROBABLY both Oscar and Ballyhoo Jones would look back on that minute as the most thrilling of their lives. Should the raging lion discover their approach before they managed to lay hands on weapons of defense nothing could save them from the fury of the great beast's attack. There was no safe retreat to which they might quickly flee; and a chase in and out around the cages containing the other confined animals could only end in their speedy overhauling.

The prospect did not appal those brave lads. What gave Oscar the most concern was the apparent fact that the pyramid of heavy boxes was showing positive signs of toppling over under the continued efforts of the animal to get at little Rosa.

In case this happened the girl would be subjected to two separate perils, for if she missed being crushed under the weight of the cases she must necessarily fall into the claws of the furious lion.

Oscar led the advance. It had been his idea to

obtain possession of those red-hot irons, and the other was satisfied to follow in his wake. Still Ballyhoo Jones would have stuck by his comrade, no matter if the escaped beast did turn upon them, and start in their direction. Ballyhoo had always been known as a "sticker," and a loyal companion.

The strain lessened a bit when Oscar found himself close up to the little charcoal furnace. He knew that even at the worst now he could make a desperate plunge forward and snatch up one of the irons before the lion might reach the spot.

There was no time to lose, however. At any second that shaky pile was apt to give way before the efforts of the straining beast. Oscar could easily imagine the abject terror of the poor girl secreted there, seeing her beloved guardian lying as if dead, and with the glaring orbs of the furious lion close to her, as with his extended groping paw he sought to reach her.

Perhaps she shrieked, but neither of the boys ever knew it. Such a puny sound would have been utterly lost in the great volume of noise that arose all around the animal tent, and with hundreds of frantic people shouting beyond the canvas walls.

What a sense of ecstasy it gave Oscar when reaching out his eager hand his fingers closing upon the wooden handle of the nearest long iron bar, the other end of which was in the heart of the small brazier.

Even as he drew it out the white heat fairly dazzled his eyes, and sent a spasm of joy to his heart,

for he knew that the boldest lion living would never be able to withstand such a potent argument; but, remembering other occasions when a burn had resulted from close contact with that spluttering rod, would slink back foot by foot, baffled, subdued.

And there was also Ballyhoo Jones eagerly securing the mate to the iron Oscar had in his grasp; of course he experienced the same mad delight that filled the soul of his chum, for being conversant with the ways of caged animals the Jones boy understood the value of such a weapon of offence and defence.

Oscar sprang toward the spot, shouting at the top of his voice, and at the same time waving the hissing iron about his head in eccentric circles, calculated to attract the notice of the animal.

In this he succeeded, for the lion was observed to turn around, and glimpsing two figures hastening toward him, start in their direction with enormous leaps.

Oscar thrust the iron in front. It must serve as the sole means for keeping that savage monster at a safe distance. If ever he managed to break through their guard the end could be easily foreseen, since they would be as helpless to save themselves as a couple of babes.

The memory of those cruel searing irons must have come back vividly to the beast, for instead of continuing in his rush, he stopped short and crouched. Oscar thought for a moment he was about to make a great leap so that he even tried

to shout to Ballyhoo to be ready to try to spring aside in time.

Then he saw that the animal dared not advance further. The recollection of the intense pain that had always followed contact with one of those bars deterred him. At the same time he was plainly defiant, and only waiting to find an opening. It behooved the two boys to allow nothing of this sort to occur, unless they wished to invite destruction.

Oscar knew that their line of action was simply to hold the attention of the lion until the trainer and his gang could secure the other beast, and come up to surround this fellow with the big mane and the swinging tail. Little Rosa would be safe there in her snug retreat, for the boxes were apt to hold, if not attacked again, which they meant should not happen.

Only one thing worried the boy. He knew that time was going to be against them, and in favor of the lion; not that they would tire out so easily, but already the fire was leaving their irons, and once the ends ceased to glow the lion might lose his fear and attack.

Something then ought to be done to prevent such a thing happening, if only he could get Ballyhoo to understand, with all that dreadful clamor going on. So he again raised his voice to a shout, and as the other's head was close by he managed to make himself understood.

"Our irons will cool off—we ought to have a fresh one right away—there is yet another in the

furnace—back over that way and change it for yours, while I hold him off! Get that, do you?"

"All right!" came from the other boy, and he immediately commenced to move backward in the direction of the charcoal furnace.

Oscar stood his ground. If anything he waved his iron more vigorously than ever, seeking to hold the attention of the crouching and snarling brute, in order that the lion might not be tempted to creep after Ballyhoo.

Again the seconds seemed interminably long to Oscar. He knew even without turning his eyes in that direction that Senor Hernandez and his whip had regained the ascendancy over the other lion, which was being gradually pushed back in the direction of an empty cage, whither several attendants had hastened in order to leave a tempting piece of fresh meat as a bait for the animal to enter.

Then something touched him on the arm, and gave him a fearful shock, such was the condition of his nervous system. But it was Ballyhoo who had returned, and immediately he was shouting in Oscar's ear:

"I fetched the whole shebang along with me," meaning the furnace. "We can keep on heatin' the irons as fast as they lose their red color. Here, take this fresh one, Oscar," and with the words the leader felt a fierce heat as the sizzling tip passed his face, after which the wooden end was placed in his hands, for he had conveniently dropped the cooling bar.

This was instantly seized by the second boy and its point thrust into the red coals. Meanwhile, the lion had moved back a little further, still snarling, and showing his teeth with baffled anger. That hissing iron annoyed him. He doubtless understood what it signified, and the prospect of coming in contact with its cruel tip gave him anything but pleasure.

But now the attendants and the animal trainer were running toward the two boys, Senor Hernandez snapping his whip savagely, and uttering certain shouts with which he was accustomed to quell a mutiny in the cage when handling his pets.

He took the iron from Oscar's hands and strode straight at the beast. The lion understood that he was face to face with his master, and immediately slunk back pace after pace, always keeping time with the advance of the man whose blazing eye cowed him.

Without waiting to see the animal enter his cage, Ballyhoo and Oscar sprang over to where Martesa was already sitting up, looking dazed. Quick as their advance may have been there was another before them. Little Rosa had come crawling out from her tottering refuge, her tender heart filled with misgivings. Her first act was to fling herself down beside the clown, about whose neck her arms were clasped, as she tenderly kissed him, and begged to know if he were seriously injured.

It turned out that after all Martesa had escaped almost miraculously, although for the time being

stunned by the concussion when knocked flat by a blow from the great paw of the lion.

Judge of the astonishment of Oscar when they were joined by Jack, who was lugging his camera along with him. The flushed face and animated glow in the eyes of the ardent photographer doubtless warned Oscar of what was coming, but at that it gave him somewhat of a shock.

"Well, I think I've got that scene down pat, if only the light was good enough," Jack was trying to tell them, though dreadfully excited, and trembling all over.

"Did you follow us under the canvas, and start the machine while we were holding that rascal at bay?" demanded Oscar, while Ballyhoo gaped in wonder and delight.

"Just what I did," replied the other with a glow of professional pride. "Think I could stay outside there, and you two at work in here? I just waited to get a swift view of the mob at the exit, struggling to force a way out; then gave my stuff in charge of a man I thought I could trust, and shoved my way under the canvas. And my stars! but it was worth seeing, that fight you put up. I've got it all down on the reel Oscar, believe me, and it'll make 'em sit up and take notice, too!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE LAST FILM FINISHED

"WELL, you're certainly a corker when it comes to getting there every time with your camera, Jack!" declared Ballyhoo, wondering what all the fellows in the home town, and some of the girls as well, would say when they saw him there, on the "movie" screen, actually facing a maddened, escaped lion, with only an iron bar for protection.

Major Barley and Mr. Carew were doing their utmost to bring order out of chaos by this time. The veteran showman realized that this accident could be made a clever source of revenue if properly advertised. Already he had "barkers" at work outside assuring the gathering throngs that there was not the slightest danger, as the lions had been returned to their cages, and would be seen later on that same evening in their wonderful entertainment.

He had sized up human nature long years ago, and knew that curiosity is a most powerful lever to collect crowds, even over-riding fear. People would come to the show even though they might be

shivering in mortal terror every time they heard some animal give vent to a roar, under the impression that the lions might be breaking loose again.

The tent filled up until it seemed as though every seat must be taken. No wonder the showman rubbed his hands together in glee. Only slight material damage had followed the breaking loose of the two lions, and it would serve as a tale to hang many a gay colored poster on in times to come.

The boys were in their selected position, meaning to secure the several pictures that would make their collection complete—that is, two of them were on the elevated platform, but Ballyhoo stuck to his old place down close to the ring. He could not have been hired at any price to abandon that spot, remembering what his presence there had meant to little Rosa on that former occasion, when her foot slipped and she was being dragged at the heels of her lunging horse.

From the very start the clown Martesa received a veritable ovation from the audience. The word had passed around that he had been knocked down by one of the lions, and as he wore a handkerchief bound around his head this revealed the truth of the rumor.

As for the charming little rider, when La Belle Rosa appeared the cheers were simply tremendous. It kept her bowing, and waving her hand for several minutes; nor did the tumult cease until she stood up on the back of her horse, thus sig-

Then loud and commanding cries of "Silence! Silence!" could be heard here and there, showing that many were concerned about her safety, since all that noise might cause her to make a miscalculation and fall to the ground.

But nothing happened to disturb the serenity of things, which was just as well, for there had already been a sufficiency of thrilling events of late in connection with the Barley Show.

Little Rosa never gave a more finished exhibition of her grace and agility. The friendly acclamation of the audience doubtless spurred her on to do her best, as it nearly always does, artists admit. She certainly quite won their hearts by her daring, and her pretty ways, so that they cheered again to the echo as she kissed her fingertips to them and rode out of the ring; while Martesa, proud of the success of his little girl, danced and pirouetted about her, and pretended that he supposed all that applause was meant for him alone.

Meanwhile, preparations were going on for the display of the dauntless wild animal-trainer. Most men might have thought twice before trusting themselves in a cage with a pair of lions that had so recently tasted freedom, and still showed such anger. Senor Hernandez knew no such sensation as fear. He had proved this on many previous occasions, and meant to do so now, knowing that all arrangements had been made looking to having a faithful picture of his great scene nifying that she was about to commence her act.

stamped on the film, for the delight and admiration of coming generations.

Oscar himself had some doubts as to the wisdom of the move; but, of course, that was none of his business. He had seen the man conquer the animals before, and he felt positive Hernandez would keep an unusually vigilant watch upon his pets on this particular night.

"It's to be hoped so, at any rate," Jack had just said to Oscar, with whom he was discussing the matter as they saw the cage containing the two lions wheeled out into the arena, while a dead hush had fallen on the eager audience, every eye being riveted on the rapidly moving beasts behind the boys.

"Yes, I was saying that to myself just when you spoke, Jack," the other went on to remark; "because for one I'd hate to see a tragedy take place right before our eyes."

"Oh! they're well prepared for that," Jack assured him; "you can see how they've fetched that little charcoal furnace forward, and attendants stand ready to snatch red-hot irons out so as to thrust them in front of the beasts if they should happen to down the Senor. But I'm all ready to start work, so here goes."

With that he commenced turning away steadily, meanwhile watching what was going on in front, so that he might not miss any incident worth recording on the film.

It proved to be a most wonderful exhibition of the power of the human mind over savage brutes.

Never had the lions shown such an unruly spirit; but Hernandez arose to the occasion, and mastered them. He forced them to do his will, despite their attempted repeated mutiny. Again and again he would compel them to carry out the customary programme; and this they finally did, though with a sullen ferocity that thrilled the entire audience, watching every movement as though spell-bound.

When, finally, it was all over, and cheers told how pleased the crowd really was that nothing unusual had happened, Oscar himself breathed a sigh of relief.

"Somehow I was afraid the Senor might find his Waterloo this night," he confessed to the perspiring Jack; "but it all went off gloriously, and I take it you've got a wonderful line of pictures covering the act. There's only the elephant part of the show to be taken, and you're through; and here comes Shamus O'Brien at the head of his little procession of tuskers right now."

"I wonder," remarked Jack, before the applause started to break out, "if one of these fine days you and I may be so fortunate as to look down on *wild* elephants marching up to a water-hole, to spout over each other. I'm indulging in great hopes, after our talks, and if it ever did come about I'd be as happy as they make 'em."

While saying this he was grinding industriously away, not wishing to omit even the beginning of the famous trained elephant act which had made Shamus O'Brien the best known trainer in the country.

Suffice to say that Jack managed to catch the full spirit of the occasion,--and when the huge beasts had taken their departure from the tan-bark ring he believed he had secured results of which any one might feel proud.

"That ends it," he told the others, for after little Rosa departed, Ballyhoo had no further desire to haunt the border of the ring, and hence with considerable difficulty had managed to climb to the elevated place where his comrades of the camera stood.

"We ought to get out of here now, before the rush begins," suggested Oscar.

They knew that already the animal cages were being taken to the train, and would soon be loaded. The canvas shelters, too, would be coming down, though last to stand would be the Big Round-top. Everything was being systematically managed, for without this no circus could ever make connections, in fulfilling engagements for one-night stands.

Martesa had promised to join them, and travel in the car. And there remained only two more performances, after which the clown and little Rosa would be free to leave the Barley Shows forever. No doubt sorrow would mingle with the joy such a release was bound to bring; for when a man has spent the better part of his life amusing children, and grown-ups as well, in the guise of a circus clown, his sudden retirement must bring with it keen regrets.

Once outside and the boys prepared to head for

the place where the car had been stored while they were at work. Jack had not done unwisely when he left his property in charge of the man outside the tent, at the time he felt that irresistible desire to see what was happening inside, and use his camera if possible to save the thrilling scene for future audiences to shiver over. The fellow had been faithful to his trust, and the property was unharmed, so, of course, Jack rewarded him handsomely.

"There's Mr. Carew," observed Ballyhoo, with a sneer in his voice.

Somehow, he fairly detested the ring-master and manager, no doubt because of the cruel way in which the other had treated little Rosa and Martesa, finally securing their discharge, just because he seemed to bear toward them such a degree of malice.

"Yes, you see he is not needed in the ring during the last part of the exhibition," explained Oscar. "That's all been arranged so as to leave him free to superintend the loading of the train, and such things."

"There, he noticed us just then," snapped Jack, "and say, did you see how he scowled this way. I tell you he hates us almost as much as he seems to poor Martesa, who never harmed a living soul in his whole life. Just as you said, Oscar, I believe Carew must have injured the clown some time or other in the past, and that is why he bears that feeling toward him now."

"His face looks as if he's been drinking pretty

heavily lately," suggested Ballyhoo Jones, just then; "and it's my honest opinion that the same Mr. Lionel Carew won't be in shape to manage the Barley Show next season, if he keeps on the way he's doing now."

"But if he went out of the show to-morrow," said Oscar, "it wouldn't make a particle of difference with our plans. We've got the promise of Mr. Simpson to settle down on that little country place of mine near Melancton; and he's not the one to go back on his word."

"Well," admitted Ballyhoo Jones, as he continued to follow the departing manager with anxious eyes, "I'll be right glad when we're heading in the direction of that same burg, with our two new friends settled in the car alongside us. And I own up that it pleases me a heap to know that I'll be able to see little Rosa often after this. Mr. Simpson says he means she shall come to school in our town, if he can afford to get a second-hand flivver, so as to fetch her in and take her home each day."

Just then neither of the other boys thought it worth while to attempt to tease the speaker on account of the sincere affection Ballyhoo seemed to entertain toward the little rider. Truth to tell, both Jack and Oscar felt pretty much the same way themselves, and realized that "those who live in glass houses should never throw stones."

Reaching the hotel they found those in whom they were most interested had not yet turned up, since they possibly had a number of things to

look after before quitting the dressing-rooms back of the big tent.

Oscar hastened to examine his car, and rejoiced to find that it was apparently in good shape. He had paid a man to keep watch over the shed in which it had been temporarily stored, and evidently if any prowlers came around, bent on doing further damage, they must have been frightened off upon discovering that the place was being guarded.

The boys had talked the matter over, and decided that it would not pay them to try to fasten that other miserable plot on Mr. Carew. Oscar disliked letting anything drop, but it would be difficult to prove the charge; and besides, such an accusation was bound to keep them from leaving when they had planned.

“At least we’ve had the satisfaction of learning who the owner of that knife turned out to be,” Jack had said, when this matter was settled, “and also who hired him to do the dirty work. That ought to be enough for us; and we’ll leave Mr. Carew to whip the horse he’s riding to an early fall!”

CHAPTER XX

A CLOSING PERFORMANCE

IN due time the clown and his ward came along. The boys were glad to see them, for somehow they seemed to feel a little uneasiness concerning the welfare of the pair. Since the ring-master entertained such a strange feeling of dislike toward Martesa and little Rosa, and had even gone to the extent of demanding that they be discharged from the company, it might be he would plot to do them further injury.

So they were soon all gathered in the car, which held the five without undue crowding; together with the various bags and other "traps," as Ballyhoo persisted in calling the luggage.

The car lights were in fair condition, and besides Oscar did not intend to drive at any fast clip; so the chances of an accident gave them little anxiety as they finally started forth. Just at the time they left the town behind them they could hear the loud shouts of the circus canvasmen engaged in lowering the big tent.

Things were going well with them, and the three motion picture comrades had reason for self-con-

gratulation as they reviewed the events of the recent past. Little Rosa, too, seemed very well satisfied with the idea of soon living in a home of her own, with real chickens and cows to pet, and actually have fresh eggs, perhaps, every day.

Martesa was trying to appear supremely happy, though Oscar, who observed the flitting signs crossing the other's seamed face, knew that every now and then the joy of having such splendid friends raised up for himself and Rosa would suffer an eclipse when he suddenly remembered the obscure threat contained in the mysterious letter he had received, signed simply by those words "Sister Amelia."

Yes, doubtless poor Martesa was wondering who the writer could be, and if she would claim Rosa, perhaps as her own daughter, offering such proofs that the clown could not gainsay them. Above all things Martesa feared that his girl might be taken away from him; for he knew that his claim could not stand the test should a parent call upon the stern arm of the law to force him to give her up.

Thanks to the clever work of Oscar at the wheel, and the absence of any traps on the road, they finally arrived safely at the next town that would witness the week-end show. Oscar had seen enough of Major Barley's enterprise to feel sure that the veteran showman must have already started things going, looking to letting the people know what a thrilling event had taken place at the last place. Young and old would be in a fever to see the lions that had broken loose, and been sub-

duced only after they had fought against heavy odds. Yes, and even little Rosa and the clown Martesa would be prominently mentioned in the poster that might be found on the fences long before the matinee performance was due.

Again Oscar found the leading hotel in town. He had insisted on Mr. Simpson and his ward being his guests until such time as they were all ready to start for Melancton; and while the clown had declared that he was spoiling them, at the same time he found himself bound to accept.

It was then nearly one o'clock, and so as the entire party stood in need of rest and sleep they did not linger longer than they could help, but went to their rooms. As before, the three boys occupied one apartment, for space was at a premium, with all those leading entertainers belonging to the big show having wired ahead for rooms.

It must have been about three in the morning when the boys heard a vehicle, evidently a hotel bus, draw up outside, and from the chatter of voices they judged that the regular express must have come in, bearing the high-priced artists, who as a rule, declined to travel aboard the slower-moving circus train.

Then by degrees the house quieted down again, and there was a chance to sleep, until shrill-voiced roosters proclaimed that the dawn had come. About eight o'clock, by previous arrangement, the little party met at the breakfast table. None of the other members of the circus staff were as yet out of bed, though they would have to ap-

pear before long, since they must take part in the street parade that was scheduled to start at eleven.

It was hard for little Rosa to believe that this was to be her very last day in the arena where she had spent so much of her young life, in one capacity or another. Still, she was bubbling over with the great happiness that had taken possession of her innocent young heart; and Ballyhoo Jones fairly glowed with the satisfaction of seeing her bright smiles.

Evidently, the child did not regret leaving the ring where daily she was accustomed to taking her life in her hands in order to gain a living, and win the applause of the fickle public, that would forget all about her a week after Rosa's name failed to appear on the new posters already ordered.

Jack had sent away his last film, with the customary precautions to insure its safe delivery to the concern that would do the needful looking to its development, and further manipulation.

"By the time we get decently settled back home," he was remarking as they sat there and enjoyed their bountiful breakfast, "I hope I'll have my entire lot of circus films in hand. Then we can try them out at the local movie house, with a select audience of our own choosing. And depend on it, Mr. Simpson, you and little Rosa will be the very first to receive an invitation."

The clown smiled wanly, and Oscar imagined that his thoughts still took him back to the occasion when he had received that strange letter.

Perhaps he was thinking that the time spoken of had about elapsed, and it might be he would soon be faced with the writer of the missive, just as he and Rosa were preparing to depart with these kind friends.

"It will certainly be a queer thing to see myself as I have appeared in the ring for many years," he said. "I hope I don't look *quite* the fool I feel at times when playing those mad pranks so as to amuse my many little friends in the audience. Still, when one has retired from the magical ring, with its odor of sawdust or tanbark, it must be nice to know that you will not be quite forgotten. Years hence children may be laughing at the antics of poor old Martesa, as they watch these wonderful motion picture scenes unfold on the screen. And I want to say again, as I have before this, that it was the greatest luck that ever happened to Martesa and little Rosa when you three splendid fellows conceived the idea of joining our show so as to try your hand at securing these films. I'll never cease to be grateful for what joy you've brought me and mine."

"That's a forbidden topic, Mr. Simpson," Oscar warned him. "You know we tabooed all further mention of that sort of talk. On our part we believe we're the ones who have received the greatest benefits from contact with you and Rosa, whom we have come to regard as a little sister." And since both parties seem to be wholly satisfied, suppose we let it rest at that."

Martesa could not answer, he was so overcome

with emotion; and there were surely tears in his eyes as he nodded his head, and tried to smile back at Oscar.

Later on they went forth again. The boys now felt quite free to do as they pleased with their time, since their work was finished. They had determined, however, to keep near the pair in whom they were so much interested. Somehow it seemed as if a portion of the clown's uneasiness had fallen on the hearts and minds of Oscar and his chums, and they began to fear lest something should happen to put a damper on their plans, just when the climax arrived.

The street parade went off without a hitch, and as usual evoked much enthusiasm among the crowds that filled the streets and watched it pass by. Rosa and Martesa might never again hear the plaudits of a street crowd, since this was their very last day; but they seemed unusually merry. The pretty little rider from her seat on the high-stepping steed, threw innumerable kisses right and left as loud cheers greeted her coming. Had she been a little queen, and that hand a royal one, she could hardly have received more abject homage from the people.

Then afterwards came the afternoon performance. It went off like clock-work, and there was a record crowd present, partly due to the rumors of what had happened on the previous day in the last show town. As before, Senor Hernandez and his cage of fierce performing lions excited the greatest interest and enthusiasm; but both little

Rosa and the clown were not forgotten in the generous applause.

This brought it to the evening again. Oscar would be glad when it was all over, and the circus had left town; for there was quite a gap to be covered during the coming Sunday, so that they could open on Monday in another distant part of the State. Somehow, he could hardly understand it, but there did seem to be a brooding sense of coming trouble hovering over him. He told himself that it was all nonsense, and no doubt brought about by the uneasiness exhibited by Martesa whenever he remembered that letter.

They had agreed to stay over until Monday came, so as to rest. An early start could be made, and Oscar believed it would be possible to reach the home town, with a fair show of luck, by night-fall.

Oscar had made another plan and forced Mr. Simpson into agreeing to its terms.

"You know you have contracted to be my tenant out at the farm," was what he told the smiling clown as they sat at supper before the rest of the company had arrived; "and so you've just *got* to be my guardian's guests when we get there. He wrote me to fetch you to our big house, where there's plenty of spare room. You see, Doctor Clements is curious to meet with the good people in whom I've taken such a deep interest. So we'll not take no for an answer, but consider that arranged."

And Martesa had to just throw up his hands

and admit that nothing could prevail against such arguments as that.

"Do with us as you will, son," he told Oscar, shaking his head slowly, and looking very affectionately at the happy face of the young fellow. "We must place ourselves unreservedly in your hands; and always thank Heaven for raising up such delightful friends in our worst time of need."

"And," said Ballyhoo Jones, as though he wanted to relieve his mind of something that continued to bother him, "I hope Rosa will be especially careful to-night, so as not to have any sort of accident. You'll promise me, won't you, Rosa?"

"Oh! there is no danger of such a thing ever happening a second time," she told him, with a ringing little laugh; "and then again I have only one more chance to be clumsy. But I do promise to be very careful, Jonathan, if that is what you want me to say."

Rosa would not call him by that absurd name of "Ballyhoo"; for she knew that with circus people it usually means a term of more or less reproach; in fact, that it typified the one who may be a barker for a side-show; and accustomed to telling whopping yarns with regard to what may be seen inside the tent for the small sum of a dime—"Only ten cents, ladies and gentlemen, to see the greatest Wonder of the Wide World, and admission well worth ten times the modest sum asked." And so, apparently, she had found out that the boy actually did have other real names, one of

which appealed to her as suitable to the occasion.

At just eight o'clock the night performance commenced with its customary grand entrance of a score of daring riders mounted on prancing steeds, many of which would soon prove that they had been wonderfully educated.

CHAPTER XXI

ALL WELL AND HOMEWARD BOUND

For once Oscar and Jack could please themselves about the matter of selecting seats. Their picture-taking was a thing of the past, so far as circus life was concerned. The films had been sent away, and they would see the result later on, after they were safely back home, if all went well.

Still, it was evident that they had a deep interest in all those nomadic people of the Big Show who daily entertained the eager public with a demonstration of their various accomplishments; for somehow both boys managed to hover near the entrance to the ring. Here they could exchange nods with a number of the athletes and other performers, for by this time the motion-picture comrades had won many good friends among the artists.

Martesa often stopped for a few words with his young champions as he flitted to and from the ring in his character of clown and entertainer. He seemed unusually nervous on this particular night,

Oscar thought. But then that was hardly to be wondered at, since the well-liked clown was saying farewell to the scenes that had been his one particular field of operation during a life time.

"It must make him kind of sad, I should say," Jack admitted, when his chum took occasion to bring up the subject.

Martesa had just left them, to accompany a party of tumblers into the ring, and make out that he was the king-pin of the sinewy bunch, to the great amusement of the crowd, always ready to applaud anything the clown did.

"I can understand all that," Oscar added, thoughtfully, "but there's something else bothering Martesa, between you and me."

"What makes you think so?" Jack demanded, with a quick glance sideways at the earnest face of his companion.

"I've been watching him closely," explained the other. "Most of the time he's in the ring Martesa seems to be looking this way and that, just as though he more than half expected to see some one whose presence would be very unwelcome to him."

"Look here, Oscar, are you referring now to the party who sent that letter to Mr. Simpson?" asked Jack.

"That's the idea I seem to have in my mind," came the ready reply.

"She signed herself Sister Amelia, didn't she?" continued Jack, looking suddenly more concerned than ever.

"Yes," said Oscar, "that was the name, and somehow I seem to believe Martesa fears she will turn out to be the mother of his little ward, and want to take Rosa from him."

At that Jack gave vent to a low whistle.

"And you really believe he keeps watching the crowd to see if any one looking like a Sister, or a nun, would be present—is that it, Oscar?"

"I interpreted his anxious look that way, Jack. But, do you know anything about this business, for I can see your face betrays it? Did you happen to glimpse such a person to-night, and here?"

"Just what I did, Oscar. I was a little surprised to see a sober-garbed Sister in such a gay crowd, too, though I don't believe I even mentioned the circumstance to you. Yes, and now that I come to think of it, she was hanging back more or less, just as if she felt a bit out of place here; though I could see her staring at the ring while Martesa was cutting up high jinks, and little Rosa kept blowing kisses to the cheering audience."

Oscar slapped his comrade on the shoulder in approbation.

"Honestly now, Jack," he said; "I believe that must have been the identical person whose name was signed at the bottom of the mysterious letter. She has come here, just as she promised she would, to tell poor Martesa some bad news about his girl."

"And," continued Jack, eagerly, "do you suppose that he, too, glimpsed her earlier in the even-

ing, which would account for his looking so blue, and watching all the while as if he expected to have her step out in the ring and face him?"

"That may be just what happened," Oscar told him; "though, of course, I'm only guessing when I say it. All the same there is such a person present, which in itself looks mighty queer, for I don't believe a Sister would attend a circus, unless she had a good reason for doing it. They are supposed to be visiting the sick and the poor, not laughing at the antics of a clown, or being thrilled with the daring of the lion-tamer or the Leopard Woman."

"It may even be," mused Jack, "that Martesa hasn't seen the party I referred to, but only has a queer sort of feeling that something terrible is impending. We happen to know he's a singular sort of a chap, and it may be he has a foreboding that somebody is going to take the joy out of his life, just when things have brightened for him."

"Yes," chuckled Oscar, "I've had just such a feeling myself, though it usually turned out that I'd eaten something that disagreed with me. But, naturally, Martesa is nervous. He fears something will mark his last appearance in the ring. I notice that he avoids Mr. Carew all he can, as if he doesn't mean to have another row with the arrogant and domineering ringmaster. In fact, Martesa wants to quit in peace."

"Well, Rosa has come and gone, and our chum Ballyhoo is breathing easier. He seemed to be

afraid something terrible might happen; but between you and the lamp-post I fancy the Big Show has had all the excitement it can stand, for this season. If lions make a business of getting out, the dear people will be afraid to patronize the circus. Once is enough."

"The canvasmen have started to demolish the menagerie," ventured Jack. "I heard wagons moving out when the band stopped. There was a dead silence in the tent while the tight-rope walker attempted her difficult feat, and the ring-master begged the people to keep quiet for fear of distracting her attention, which might make her lose her balance and fall."

"Yes, and it will soon be all over here," the other boy said, with a slight touch of regret in his voice. "For one I've enjoyed the experience a heap; and I never expect to forget what I've seen and heard while traveling with a big circus."

"How modest you are, Oscar," laughed Jack; "most fellows would have added that one word 'done' to the list when about it; for my pictures will show, in a way, you can't dispute that you held that raging lion at bay like a hero. Talk to me about Nero's times, when gladiators faced lions in the Roman arena, to make a holiday for the cruel emperor and the fickle people, you had the whole bunch beat to a frazzle; only you won't admit it. But motion pictures won't lie, and you'll be shown up in spite of yourself."

Oscar laughed at the prediction of his ally. When he stood there brandishing that hissing iron

before the crouching king of the African forest, the last thought he had in mind was of posing as an heroic figure, for he had no idea Jack was whirling the crank of his camera and catching the picture. Indeed, all Oscar thought about was the dreadful position of poor Martesa, lying there apparently badly injured; and the frightened little girl rider who crouched under the friendly boxes which the demoralized beast was endeavoring to pull down so as to get at his intended victim.

"Suppose we move along out of this, and find Major Barley, Jack? I'd like to say good-bye to him, for he's been pretty decent to us. Besides, he feels badly about losing Martesa and Rosa, who have been with him so long; in fact, the girl is in one sense the protégé of the Barley Shows, for as an infant, you know, she was left under the Big Round-top here."

They soon found the old showman, who chatted with them for a short time, though as usual he had lots of business to attend to. He professed to be very glad to have known the boys, and made arrangements to see the results of their great venture in the line of thrilling motion-picture films.

"I believe in keeping up with the times, you know," the circus proprietor told them. "Some showmen might object to having their principal acts cribbed, and displayed on the screen at innumerable movie theatres all over the country; but I've been in contact with people too long to

believe that would keep a single man, woman or child from attending my performance when I arrive in town. In fact, I firmly believe it will advertise me as never a show has been before. And here's wishing you fine young chaps all the success possible in whatever venture you next pick out. You've got it in you to succeed in anything you tackle."

With these kind words the big showman beamed on the three chums, for Ballyhoo had joined them by now; shook hands all around, and hurried away. They soon heard his loud voice ordering things done back of the tent, for Major Barley had spent the better part of his life in the midst of these scenes of turmoil and excitement, and he could find no happiness away from it.

Then came Martesa, who promised them he would be ready inside of half an hour. He must say good-bye to all his good friends who had known him so long, and many of whom were really depressed at the thought of parting from both the clown and little Rosa.

By this time it was generally known that Martesa and his ward meant to quit the saw-dust ring for good, and also that the clown was about to spend the remainder of his life in the country.

The boys managed to get in the dressing-tent where almost the entire company pressed up one after another to bid the pair good-bye, and convey their best wishes for the future. As time was valuable, and the scene one of great confusion,

there could be no ceremony. Rosa was dressed in her street clothes, and had her bundle ready to take along with her. She cried when some of the ladies connected with the show, who had been so good to her in the days gone by, kissed her fondly. Even Martesa had difficulty in composing his features; but still Oscar noticed that his gaze wandered beyond the clustering friends at times, as though seeking some unfamiliar figure, which possibly he dreaded to see.

Finally, Martesa broke away and went to doff the livery of a clown for the very last time. Rosa remained with the boys until in the end they were joined by the retired fun-maker. As Mr. Simpson he would now be known to the end of the chapter, for with the act of stepping out of the ring forever he dropped his identity as the great Martesa. And the applauding crowds would soon be laughing just as merrily at the antics of some successor; for such is the brief reign of any one who depends on the fickle public for favor.

They all went over to the hotel so as to get away from the noise and confusion attending the moving of the circus. The crowd had passed on, and while some lingered to see the Big Round-top come down, they were but a handful. With the finish of the last act interest in the show had ceased with the vast majority of the people, and the prospect of a comfortable bed attracted them more.

Once at the hotel, Oscar disclosed the fact that he had ordered a late supper prepared just to celebrate the wind-up of the venture undertaken by

himself and comrades; as well as the great change that was about to take place in the fortunes of Mr. Simpson and little Rosa.

They were soon summoned to the dining-room, and it was while sitting down amidst more or less laughter and boyish talk that Oscar suddenly noticed the absence of the clown.

"Where's Mr. Simpson?" he exclaimed. "I thought he was just behind me when I started in here. Landlord, will you step into the other room and tell him we're waiting for him. This supper is partly in his honor, you know."

"He will soon be with you, Mr. Farrar," the hotel man observed. "There is a lady in the other room talking with him just now, a Sister, I take it, from the garb she wears. You can see them through the open door there if you look!"

Oscar and Jack exchanged troubled glances when they heard the landlord say this; for they knew that the clown's fear must have come true, and that Sister Amelia had come to disclose her secret concerning little Rosa's parentage.

Through the open door they watched Mr. Simpson. Sure enough the retired circus clown was talking earnestly with a woman garbed as a Sister.

"Why, he doesn't seem to be broken, and down-hearted, that I can notice!" exclaimed Jack, as though both astonished and pleased. "See how he talks to her, with his face lighted up, will you? Now he's reading some sort of paper she gave him.

I believe the dear old fellow is both crying and laughing at the same time. Oscar, what sort of news do you think he has heard to make him act so queer?"

"I give it up, Jack," returned the other, with a shake of his head. "I might try to guess a good many things, and then be as far away as ever. But hold your horses, for we'll soon know. You can see she's given him her hand now; look, Jack, why, he's kissing it just as if she might have brought him the most glorious news any one could dream of."

"There," Jack hastened to say, "she's turning away, and is going; while here comes Martesa, in a hurry, too. Now we're due for a surprise, I reckon!"

It proved to be a far greater shock than either of the boys had imagined could be the case. Mr. Simpson rushed into the dining-room. His face was lighted up in a way none of the boys could ever remember seeing it before, not even when he first learned about the elegant plans they had for his future comfort. Now his eager eyes sought out little Rosa, and he rushed over to where the astonished girl stood. As he gathered her in an almost fierce embrace the astonishment of Oscar and Jack and Ballyhoo Jones knew no bounds when they heard what he said.

"My child, my own child, my little Rosa! Oh! to think that you are after all my own flesh and blood, and that no one on earth can ever separate us! It is a miracle, the most wonderful thing that

ever happened! And now at last I know why from the very first something in my heart made me love you as a babe. Oh! I am the happiest man on the whole earth to-night!"

Then as if suddenly remembering how all this must be the same as so much Greek, not only to the three boys but to Rosa as well, he hastened to continue, even as he fondled the girl, and kissed her between words:

"Rosa is my child, you see. When my wife fled from the circus with some one whose identity I never knew, she quarreled with him before many days had passed, and left him even as she had me. Six months later our child came to her. She was at the time in the care of one of the Sisters in a city. Some strange fancy caused her to determine partly to undo the wrong she had done me by leaving our child where I could find it. You know how this was brought about, and that I insisted on adopting the sweet little babe, to fill a vacancy in my aching heart.

"The Sister told me that after having seen the child was cared for and in my possession my poor wife joined the Order, and all these years has been trying to show her repentance by doing good works. She died two weeks ago, and before passing away confided her secret to this Sister Amelia, with instructions that I be told the wonderful facts. It was all she could do to recompense me for the past suffering, and I—oh! I have long ago forgiven her, even as I hope for mercy in the Hereafter myself."

It was hard for the boys to grasp the astonishing truth. They heartily congratulated Mr. Simpson and little Rosa. The girl was clinging to her father with the love light glowing in her big eyes, as though this new tie might only seem precious to her in that it revealed the always tantalizing mystery of her parentage.

"And did the good Sister tell you the identity of the man who wrecked your family life, sir?" asked Jack, presently, possibly consumed with curiosity.

"Yes, I know who he is now, though I never suspected it before," replied the other, swallowing a lump that seemed to threaten to choke him. "Much is made plain to me that I could not understand. But I shall not attempt to bring him to account. It is too late now to do any good, and unless I am mistaken he will before a great while be brought before a bar where justice is always meted out to the guilty. Let Heaven punish him as he deserves; his name will never pass my lips. It is happiness enough for me to have my little girl with me always and now I need never fear her being taken from me."

Oscar and Jack did not need to be told any more. They knew just as well as if they had read the facts in flaming letters that it was the vindictive ring-master who in the years long gone had separated poor Martesa and his foolish wife. But the mild nature of the erstwhile clown would not permit him to dream of such a thing as vengeance, which he believed belonged alone to Heaven.

He was satisfied with the wonderful thing that had come to pass, when little Rosa turned out to be his own daughter, and realized that no one on earth had the right to take her from his arms.

After the little party had managed to recover to some extent from this excitement they sat down at the table to partake of the feast provided. The landlord had really managed very well, considering that this was not the White Light district of New York City, where all manner of dainties could be served on short notice.

Everybody was happy, it seemed. The three boys had completed what they believed to be a very successful business venture, and could well afford to laugh and appear as though they did not have a care in the world. On his part Mr. Simpson had never seemed so merry, for the world looked exceedingly bright to him, and his last anxious fear had been laid to rest. As for little Rosa, she fairly sparkled, and told amusing stories of her experiences in the past, while her expressive face kept Ballyhoo Jones busy fairly devouring it with his enraptured eyes, much to the secret delight of his chums.

"We'll rest up to-morrow, and on Monday be off early in the morning for a long day's run to the home port," Oscar told them during the progress of the supper. "I don't see how I can hold out that long, I'm so anxious to have you meet my guardian, and then take a look at the little country place. The chickens and the cow and the

pigs and sheep are all there, waiting for little Rosa to come and make pets of them. But I mustn't tell you too much about it now, for then you may be disappointed when you see the reality."

Rosa declared she, too, could hardly wait, but she supposed there was nothing else to do. A dozen times she asked some question about that wonderful Paradise, which she declared the farm would be to her; and Oscar just had to answer in spite of his resolve to keep the rest a secret from her.

That was a restful Sunday for them all. They wandered about the little town, and talked of nearly everything but the circus. Now that he had left the ring for ever it seemed as though Mr. Simpson meant to try and put its memories out of his mind as much as he could. Indeed, the bitter mingled with the sweet too strongly for him to have any regrets, and wish to return to the scenes of his earlier triumphs.

At last the time came for their departure. Oscar had seen to it that the car was in "apple-pie" condition, as far as an old "rattletrap" like that could ever be said to be in shape. He expressed the belief, however, that they would have comparatively "smooth sailing" most of the way, for the roads were fairly good, and as for the weather it left nothing to be desired.

In passing out of the town it chanced that they came in sight of the place where the big show had encamped on Saturday. The spot looked for-

lorn and deserted now, with all the glitter and pomp missing. Little Rosa turned to take a last look at the place of her parting triumph; and Ballyhoo could see a little wistful expression flit across her pretty face. He knew that she was saying farewell forever to the plaudits of the crowd, to the sea of eager faces, and the waving hats and handkerchiefs that always greeted her act. When she turned again there was a suspicious trace of moisture in her eyes; but she laughed in the boy's face, and her manner told him she had no longer any regrets.

Here we may leave them, well on the homeward way. It can be set down as certain that the retired clown and his sweet little daughter would be warmly welcomed to the house of good old Doctor Clements; and that when they visited the farm both of them must fall in love with their new home.

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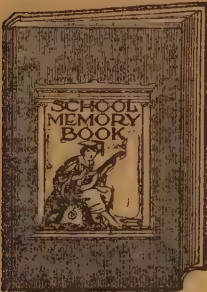
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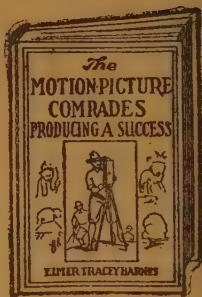
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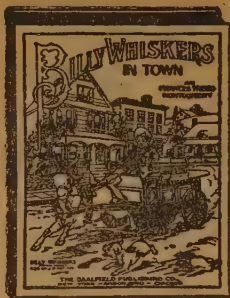
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